THE CASTLE BY THE SEA

H·B·MARRIOTT WATSON

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THE CASTLE BY THE SEA

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Toosey hailed it, and was answered back

[*See page 231*] *Frontispiece*

THE CASTLE BY THE SEA

By H. B. MARRIOTT WATSON

Author of "Hurricane Island," "The Privateers," etc.

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With Illustrations
By HERRMAN PFEIFER

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To

J. B. PINKER

WITH THE MEMORIES OF EIGHTEEN YEARS'
FRIENDSHIP

FROM

H. B. MARRIOTT WATSON

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THE CASTLE BY THE SEA

CHAPTER I

THE BOOK IN THE GALLERY

IT was on the evening of the fifth of May, just before the day had fully declined into twilight, that I got my first sight of Norroy Castle. I had taken a fly at the distant station of Arncombe, and, to the accompaniment of the friendly driver's gossip, had rattled along the country roads and down the little inlet for a few miles to Southington, when we made almost a full right wheel and began to climb the hill. At this stage, owing to the lessening of the clatter and the dwindling of the noise of the water, my man and I got on terms of even closer intimacy. He leaned back to explain to me points of the scenery, and to indicate features of interest, as he was no doubt wont to do to tourists. I was not a tourist, but I certainly had the neighborhood as much at heart as any bird of passage. It was to be my environment for some three months; and I stood up occasionally and looked about me.

We were rising slowly but surely now, and below, the darkling inlet had become a romantic channel of fancies to my mind. I was glad I had taken Norroy Castle; glad, too, I had taken it on trust; for this was my inaugural visit, and I had, so to say, bought a pig in a poke. However, it was only for the summer, and

already I was enchanted by my indiscretion. Indiscretion! I thought, and laughed. Why, it was only so that Romance got her chance; it was dull reason that went jog-trot through a humdrum life. As well be chained to a desk, as well keep your stall in the Augean stable of full cities, as well —

My mind, poising on the wings of this fine welcome, had got thus far, when the driver's voice broke upon its raptures.

"Sir Gilbert — he has n't been down here since he was a boy; has n't been here since he came in for the title. Can't abide it, they say. It 's dull for him, maybe, after London."

I think he was still speculating in his slow mind if I were a tourist; yet my luggage (for I had brought a few small bags with me) must have puzzled him. I had no doubt that he wondered if the gentleman were on a visit to the housekeeper.

I made no answer, thus brought down to mere fact; and he continued, "'Ere 's the top of the hill, and the gate."

I stood up again, and, as the carriage crawled up the last steps of the ascent, looked back once more. The estuary wavered in twilight, from Arncombe, which was hidden by the curving shores, to the hamlet at the foot of the water. Only the roofs of Southington village, a couple of miles below us, witnessed to human habitation. And then my eyes went seaward — ah, in a vast surprise.

The prospect took my breath. I had been gazing backward and downward upon prettiness, the narrow winding waters, the wooded shores, the comely, crowded picture of the English landscape. Now my vision fared

forward and outward. The waters of the Channel roared out yonder; the wind came off it with a savor like strong wine; the sparkle sprang in my eyes, in my face, in my heart. This was Norroy Castle; this was my home. And here was I, trundling along in a ragged old cab, like that visitor to the housekeeper. The scene gave me heart; it inspired me. If I were to write anywhere I could write here, within sound and smell of that fragrant-blown sea. Oh, it was worth living for, that early May evening, with the lights fading in heaven, and the darkling estuary, and the kindling water of the Channel. I drew in my breath and gave thanks. What a fool was this Sir Gilbert Norroy who had visited so glorious a place only a few times since boyhood! What a barbarian! What a Goth! I cried in my heart, and as I did so my eyes were arrested by a man who was watching me from a little distance.

He was a good-looking fellow, dressed rather scrupulously in a costume of the tourist order, which concluded most decorously with a Homburg hat; and he was smoking a cigar.

"These be the gates, sir," remarked my affable driver again. It was before the gates that the stranger was standing, and his face caught my curious gaze even before I regarded the threshold of my new domain. It was a handsome face, as I have said, the moustache silky and drooping, the eyes soft and languid, the white countenance characterized by something almost effeminate. His manners were good, for his gaze dwelled on me and went by in the fashion of good-breeding.

"One of them visitors at Southington, sir," commented my driver, as we rolled through the gateway into the gravelled track. I paid no heed, for I was oc-

cupied now with the park. What were all the strangers of Christendom to me beside my park?

The drive trailed in a pleasant old-fashioned sweep through limes of immemorial age, and entered, after a brief but glorious career of this kind, a shrubbery of rhododendrons in full bud, of laurels, of fragrant syringas, and of opening lilac. The cloud of shrubbery made a little darkness of the twilight; and then we came out into the open again, where the sward, studded with trees, led down towards the sea. And here was my second stranger, — but this time of quite another character. It was a slim, tall girl, of an exquisite promise of ripeness, but of years too early for that maturity which should some day be her glory. She was wandering upon the sward, and, like the stranger at the gates, cast on me a glance, well-bred like his, but of a delicacy and shyness that was eloquent of her sex. I had the rudeness to turn in my seat and watch her after we had passed, until I lost the last glimpse of her slender white figure vanishing into the shrubbery.

Once more my domain claimed my attention, and now with louder voice; for we were drawing up to the Castle.

Norroy Castle was a small building, of considerable antiquity, and of admirable repair. The ravages of time and conquest were not visible on its seemly face, which was presented to the brawling sea that lay only a few hundred yards away. The garden declined towards this with flower beds and shrubberies, and interspersed lawns and walks; but I could not discern in the twilight in what style they had been kept. Beyond, the sea stormed at the pale in which this castle stood, but the slow slopes went down to it in tranquil greenery.

Upon the further side, as far as I could make out, there was a rise in the grounds, and sea-fowl screamed in the air above low cliffs. I had entered into my kingdom, and pronounced it good. I was now to enter also into the Castle itself.

The oaken door, giving upon the gravel, was opened by a stolid man of middle age in the conventional dress of a butler. It seemed to me that he stared and stood for an unnecessarily long time ere he spoke.

"Mr. Brabazon, sir," he asked.

"Yes, and you are Jackman?" I returned, for that was the name of the housekeeper I had received from the solicitors.

"Yes, sir," he said formally, and stepping briskly over the threshold, set to work on my packages.

I entered, after paying the fly-man, and found myself in a hall of fair size, lighted with a swinging lamp of cathedral glass, which revealed, out of the circumjacent darkness, a gallery above my head. Here a woman's voice greeted me, and I assumed the owner to be Mrs. Jackman. "We did not expect you till to-morrow, sir," she said, with some timidity of manner.

"I changed my mind," I explained. "Did my boxes come?"

"Yes, sir; this morning," she answered, and bustled away on some feminine errand, maybe connected with cooking.

I was waiting on my friend, Jackman, who now appeared with his hands full of my small kits, but instinctively I turned to follow the woman.

"Not that way, sir," said the butler hastily, almost blocking my path in his anxiety lest I should go wrong. "It goes to the kitchen apartments, sir," he explained

deferentially. I waited till he indicated the door which I was permitted to pass, and then entered. It was a small room, brightly lighted, and a wood fire burned in the open grate. I had a sense of a smell of tobacco, and tobacco none too fragrant at that; and I concluded that Mr. Jackman had been caught unawares by my inopportune arrival. But I had made up my mind. This room was for me.

It was lightly furnished, and the corners were squared off on two sides, so as to give an irregular shape to it. The window, which was mullioned, looked on a little sward of its own betwixt projecting buttresses of the building, and thence across the gravel drive to the more spacious lawn beyond. Night by this time had swallowed the garden and the woods, but out of that deepening darkness the fret of the ocean beat upon my ears quite pleasantly.

"This is where I should like my meals, Jackman," I said to the waiting butler.

"Certainly, sir," said he, after a momentary pause, and again there was a pause before he went on. "Mrs. Jackman prepared the west wing rooms, sir, in case you should want them."

"Well, I 'll have a look round," I said amiably. "Meanwhile this will do very well. What 's off that way?"

"There 's a morning-room giving to the garden, sir," said he, "and the old staircase to the first floor."

"And my bedroom?" I inquired.

"Mrs. Jackman prepared the west wing rooms, sir," he repeated respectfully. "I thought you might like them all handy. They 're on the ground floor together."

"Very well," I assented. "I 've no doubt they will suit me," and so dismissed him to his duties.

The long day in the air had made me agreeably tired, and I was hungry, so that after the necessary preparations I was glad to sup and rest. I took some pleasure in exploring the route to my bedroom, which I did under Jackman's guidance, and by the light of two candles. We passed through a lofty room with covered furniture, into a short passage, and thence into a fine large chamber which fronted the west, and which, I gathered, was designed for my use as a drawing-room. Close to it was my bedroom, rather too large and rather too lofty, and, I thought, rather too cold. But as I changed into other clothes, I was aware that there were delightful possibilities in its dignity, if not in its prospect.

As I was finishing my toilet, I heard a step on the stone passage without, which at first I took to be Jackman's; but it passed and died away and I heard no more of it. Yet, as I opened the door to return, the sound of a creaking above reached me. The wind darted down the cold alley of stone and sent my flame guttering; and, shading it with my open palm, I picked my way back through the silent chambers to my cosy dining-room. Here I forgot everything save the satisfaction of my appetite.

The fire burned cheerfully, and a late spring wind snapped about the mullions. Mrs. Jackman, a thin, bright-eyed woman, entered in order to make my acquaintance, I am sure. She professed herself anxious to learn if I were comfortable, and, speaking with a soft country burr, hoped I should "like myself." Not so, I was certain, would the immaculate, armor-plated Jack-

man speak. Mrs. Jackman made an approach to conversing; Jackman could only answer. But it was the woman's opportunity, and she made the most of it. I learned, among other things, that she rejoiced Sir Gilbert had let at last; that the house had not been kept up for years, not since Sir Edmund died; that Sir Gilbert had been a stranger to it since he was a boy; that Jackman and she had lived in London a good deal in Sir Gilbert's service; and that Sir Gilbert was twenty-nine and unmarried. I gathered on the way through this that any princess would be fortunate if she should be chosen by Sir Gilbert. It was altogether a pretty exhibition of the feudal temper.

When she retired, my thoughts went to the bag in which I had stowed some favorite books, and I opened it. A flagon of whiskey was on the table, my pipe was at my elbow, and I had a choice volume to hand. I was exceedingly peaceful, but somehow I did not read. Migration is unsettling to the mind, which settles down with reluctance after the disturbance of its roots. A mass of papers, inserted at the last moment in this particular bag, turned itself out on the carpet, and an illustrated weekly took my eye. It was one of an earlier date, which had furnished my introduction to Norroy Castle. With some curiosity, after the accomplished fact, I found the advertisement — of "an old castle to let furnished for the summer months."

I wondered now why I had been induced to write. Such lures by agents are none too uncommon. Anyway, I was here, and in possession. Perhaps it had been the notion of the environing sea, or of the quietude; or was it the transient flash of some romantic feeling? At least the place promised well for my writ-

ing, and if I could not finish my "Studies in Earth" in this retreat, they would probably forever remain a beautiful dream.

Do you know that officialism of business? How it wearies, aggravates, and incenses the ordinary decent man? "Yours of the 3rd ult. . . ." "Your esteemed order. . . ." "Our best services. . . ." Well, I was assured that I should find the house in every way commodious and desirable. But what maggot was in the red head of the clerk who ought to have known better, when he hinted about the ghost? Perhaps under that rigid exterior he had a soul, some imagination, or a sense of humor. Perhaps it was even a shrewd and oily attempt to clinch a "deal," and he had read something in my eyes. They are the eyes of thirty something, but I pray they are yet romantic. Anyway, the ghost emerged from the shadows and exhibited itself momentarily in the garish light of Pall Mall. Then it disappeared.

"There 's said to be a ghost in the Castle."

Perhaps, after all, it was mere banality, but I believe it did rivet the bargain. And here I was with the Castle on my hands, and the Norroy ghost, if so be tradition spoke correctly. Why, I had forgotten to ask Mrs. Jackman about it! Never mind, the fire soothed, and the tobacco also. I did not want to move. My eyes fell again on the book I had not read, and I remembered something else that the red-headed clerk had mentioned, — "a fine library and picture-gallery." It had slipped my memory.

Jackman entered at the moment to inquire if I needed anything more that night, and I tackled him.

"Yes, sir," he said, with his punctilious interval of

pause, as if he would make sure I had done talking. "The library is up-stairs, sir, left wing — over your rooms, sir. The picture-gallery and library are one."

I love old libraries; and I would go on my travels in this. I ruminated over glass and pipe till the loud voice of the bracket clock stirred me from dreams. It struck ten, and, as I have said, I was tired. Plainly, it should be my duty as well as my pleasure to go to bed; and I went.

I slipped into a slumber, very light and easy, out of which and into which I drifted again and again without any feeling of discomfort or restlessness. I awoke and heard the rain that beat on the westward windows; I heard steps upon the flagged passageway; I thought I heard voices. But nothing of that sort troubled me; it was a whisper that did that. It is odd how the lesser noise provokes the sleeper, while the voice of cannon in his ear or thunder in heaven would pass almost unremarked. I sat up, listening.

Was it the wind that whispered in the draughty passage, or was it a human voice? I lit the candle and, looking at my watch, found it was between twelve and one. No one should be about at such an hour. I got up, went to the door and hearkened; and now I thought I heard a footstep in the distance. The house was enveloped in silence. I opened the door; then followed a thin but distinct clatter of some object falling on stone, and on that an objurgation. I hesitated no longer. This could hardly be Jackman, and, if it were, he must be taught the first duties of a servant. With the candle in my hand, I went down the passage in the direction of the sound.

As I walked, it seemed to me that the noise retreated;

certain crepitations came out of the darkness ahead, which was all the greater darkness because of my light. I turned into the morning-room on the trail, now raised to a pitch of some excitement. A foot, as I could have sworn, stumbled not a dozen paces away. I ran forward.

"Who is that?" I cried.

Even as I did so, the ghost emerged in my mind. But ghosts do not stumble on stairs; and that was what had happened. Nor do ghosts carry pencils, so far as I know, and it was a pencil I picked up. Jackman had spoken of the old staircase, and now I nearly ran into it. It rose to the first floor from an antechamber, behind the morning-room, and I almost caught the pencil, as it rolled from stone to stone. It was the second time that pencil had been dropped, I was sure, for the same clink saluted my ears.

I went up the staircase as swiftly as I could, and thought in that moment I had a glimpse of the intruder. But just then the candle went out, caught, as I supposed, by some blast along the upper corridor. Feet sounded now shamelessly before me, as some one ran for it. I was following, but was grabbed sharply by the shoulder and held from behind with two arms. I wrestled with my assailant at a disadvantage, and for some minutes there was audible only the noise of the struggle. Then, with an effort, I threw off my adversary.

"Help!" he cried, as he sprawled.

Why should a burglar cry for help in the house of his victim? I lit a match and peered down. It was Jackman!

"The devil!" I ejaculated.

"The burglar!" he panted.

I grinned. It was too ridiculous, that we should have been destroying each other, while the invader got safely away. But had he? I assisted Jackman to his feet.

"Never mind. He 's gone this way. What rooms are these?" I asked hurriedly.

"The — the library!" he puffed out. "But — but he can't be there."

"Oh, well, we 'll see," I threw at him, as I strode quickly down the corridor.

It was not quite true that he could not be in the library, but it was certainly true that he might be in one of a dozen places. Four doors opened from the corridor towards the front of the Castle, and here were as many hiding-places as rooms. I was conscious of Jackman panting behind me, and then I gained the library. The door was wide open, giving promise of the quarry; and the first gleam of the candle on the walls told me where I was. It was a long chamber, stretching, I gathered, along the whole reach of the west wing on this floor; and faces in paint stared stiffly down upon me as I thus roughly intruded on their quiet. That quiet had endured in some cases for centuries, but I paid no heed to this haughty greeting, and moved among the bookcases with my detective light. Darkness lurked in all like an ambuscade, and shadows leaped out at me. The shifting blackness in which that gallery lay enveloped started into life and walked with me. I peered, and heard Jackman's heavy breathing over my shoulder.

"Are we looking for a ghost, Jackman?" said I.

"I — I don't know, sir," he panted, and added: "There is a ghost, sir."

"And he carries pencils," I commented; and came at the word to a pause.

We had reached one of the huge marble fireplaces halfway down the room, and my candle disclosed something upon the bare floor. I stooped and picked it up.

"What — what — ?" chattered Jackman's teeth over my shoulder, and he put forward a hand as if he would have grabbed it.

"No," said I, "we 've no time;" and I pushed on swiftly.

In the bays of the library no thief skulked, and the candle flashing about the room revealed no one. We reached the north wall at last, which I perceived to be fronted with oak up to the height of ten feet. An ancient handle caught my eye, suggesting a door.

"What 's this?" I asked Jackman.

"The strong-room," said he, promptly.

I tried the handle, twisted it and tugged at it.

"It 's locked?" I asked.

"The key is in possession of Sir Gilbert, sir," he answered.

I meditated; there was no chance of concealment here then, but the discovery supplied perhaps a motive. However, that would wait. The urgent matter was to catch the thief. Jackman had gone to a window.

"This is open, sir," he called. "He must have got out this way."

I joined him. The windows were casements, and sure enough one had been cast adrift from its moorings, and swung lightly to and fro. I gazed down into the darkness.

"It must be thirty feet," I said. "Not impossible. Let 's explore the other side."

Jackman's respectful voice urged reasons why the villain must have escaped this way, but I paid no heed. I crossed to the other corner, where the window looked forth on a courtyard, and then noticed a door in the north wall. It was ajar, and I pushed it wider, disclosing a closet of oak, which was empty. But a darker shadow in the floor took my eye, and I went in. Before me a narrow stone staircase descended to the ground floor. I had just made this discovery when, for the second time, my candle went out abruptly.

I uttered an exclamation of annoyance, and turned, for I could have sworn that the draught had not come from below. I groped in the candlestick, but to my chagrin could not find the box of matches. It must have fallen, I thought, that time I had been struggling with Jackman; and then, of a sudden, I remembered that I had used it to light the candle afterwards. But anyhow, it had gone, slipping somewhere during our reconnoitre, no doubt. I carried nothing of course in my pajamas; but Jackman was properly clothed, and I called to him.

"Have you any matches?" I called.

There was silence, during which I conceived him to be fumbling in his pockets, and then he spoke.

"Sorry, sir; no, sir."

I ejaculated my disappointment tersely. "Never mind," said I, "we must go down all the same. Where does this lead?"

"Into the western passage, sir," he returned, "near your rooms."

I dropped down as lightly as I could, and Jackman's heavier weight punctuated the silence. Certainly it would give my burglar notice, for all the world as if it

were policeman's boots that stamped on the stone. Presently, I touched the lower floor, and put out my hand, groping till I grazed a wall. It took me several minutes to find a door, but at last I succeeded, and, feeling along a passageway, we painfully progressed.

"Where are we now?" I asked at last.

"Back in the room you dined in, sir," said Jackman.

"Good Lord! I give it up!" I remarked in despair.

There was the sound of a match crackling, and a spurt of fire issued from Jackman's fingers. "Why, man, you have matches!" I cried.

"Just got them from the mantelpiece, sir," he explained. He lit my candle, and we surveyed each other.

"It 's no go, Jackman," I said with resignation. "We 're done. By the way, what is kept in the strong room?"

"The family plate, sir, and the gold service presented to Sir Craven in 1772, and the Norroy jewels."

"Ah!" I said significantly. "Well, we are not worth much as detectives, Jackman, and I think we may take it our man has vanished, and go to bed."

"Yes, sir," agreed the butler.

We parted, and I sought my room. But I was thoroughly awake and likely to remain so. So I flung myself on the bed, and took out of my pajamas pocket the object I had picked up in the library. It was a black note-book, such as might be purchased at any stationer's shop for a few pence. There was no mark on it to indicate ownership, and only the name of a stationer in Kensington in tiny type in one corner. But what puzzled me was the contents. Only some three or four pages had been used, and these were

covered in a scrawling male hand, as if it were written by an uneducated, or semi-educated person.

"Madona and child," I made out, and beneath, "Coregio."

"Storm — Claude. . . ."

"Lady Claire Norroy — Reynolds," and this was starred heavily thus — *

"Pilage of Sain — Sant — San Sebastion." The writer had made several attempts to arrive at accuracy here.

I gazed at the pages in perplexity, and also in disappointment. They seemed merely to contain a list of pictures, which was hardly in keeping with the property of a thief. Was there, after all, any connection between the pencil, which obviously did belong to the intruder, and this book? At any rate, there was no clue here. And when I had come to this conclusion, rather sadly, I remembered the dark staircase. An impulse urged me to take my light and inspect it forthwith.

I traced my way along the passage until I came to a door which must have admitted us on our backward journey. Beyond was the staircase for certain, winding upward. But what interested me more was another door, fronting the staircase; and this I examined. To my surprise it was unlocked, and when I turned the handle, a rush of cool air streamed in. My light glimmered on the gravel of the courtyard. This door gave access to the safe and empty night.

It was plain at last how the burglar had escaped. I locked the door and went back to my room; and, satisfied thus far with my elucidation of the mystery, I slowly found the sleep for which I resolutely composed myself.

CHAPTER II

PERDITA

I HAVE said that I was pleased with the dignity of my chamber, which was too admirably proportioned to seem over large. And as the full light of the morning bathed the grounds, I was more than delighted with its prospect. It stared wide of the lawns, out of two long windows, upon some bright spring beds, and a wilderness of trees. Across the sward a gap in a thick beech hedge broke the way into a tangled wild orchard, which again passed into the trees of the small park; while, over the field of green lawns, was the ever-moving water of the Channel. A huge red thorn danced soberly in the sunshine across the gravel path, and the bastions of the sea were blue and sparkling. My eyes carried from foreground to distance with immense delectation. I dressed in cheerful spirits, anxious to be out and enjoying that fine sea-breeze. And then, unexpectedly, I recalled the adventure of the night, and my glance went to the table by my bed for the little note-book. To my astonishment, it had vanished!

I searched everywhere, hunting in every likely place in the room, but without result. The book had disappeared as absolutely as if it had never existed at all. Well, here was another problem to use my wits on. I was nothing loath, and I started on it. I had certainly left the book in my room when I had gone forth to

explore the second time. Ergo: it had been stolen during my absence. I had no doubt in my own mind as to the identity of the thief; yet it threw open an appalling prospect. The burglar had not escaped from the house, but had been in hiding through the night and had reclaimed his property.

There seemed to be no other solution possible, yet I consulted Jackman at breakfast, which he served like the expert servant he was. He was respectfully surprised to hear of the book's disappearance, and was anxious to know if I was sure I had placed it on the table. But he had no alternative solution to offer; nor, so far as I could see, did the idea of the nocturnal thief trouble him as much as it did me. But, then, one never knows what emotions beat under the unruffled exterior of the well-trained servant. He appeared to be much more concerned lest I should not have the marmalade I liked, and the coffee to my taste, than lest Norroy Castle should be rifled of its treasures. And that thought reminded me of the strong-room, diverting my attention from the lost note-book.

"The plate and the jewels must have been the object," I said, wondering at the carelessness which did not entrust such valuables to a bank or safe deposit.

Jackman agreed with me, precipitately for him: "Yes, sir; very likely, sir." But the hinge on which they swung was bound to bring my thoughts back.

"And if the note-book meant nothing, Jackman, why was it stolen from me?"

"You don't know what was in it, sir?" suggested Jackman tentatively.

"Why, yes; and that is the strange part of it. It

held no deadly or dangerous secrets. It was merely a list of pictures."

"Indeed, sir," Jackman uncovered the dish of kidneys.

"A list, suggesting it was a list of the pictures in the library," I added. "Is there a portrait of Lady Claire Norroy there?"

"Yes, sir, I think there is," said the butler, handing me the toast.

"And is there a Claude?"

"Claude, sir?" repeated Jackman, deferentially, but without intelligence.

It was clear that the name of the celebrated painter conveyed no meaning to him. "I don't think there was any Norroy called Claude, sir," he added thoughtfully.

I was, of course, bent on an examination of the library and its treasures by daylight, and immediately after breakfast ascended the staircase. The room had a worn and dilapidated air in the sunshine which was merciless to its shabby furniture. Yet its faded honors clothed it with a certain impressiveness and the pictures redeemed it altogether for dignity. The pictures were not numerous, but some work by great hands decorated the walls. There was the Reynolds of Lady Claire, the Claude beyond doubt, an obvious Velasquez, and a characteristic Rubens. If Lely were not represented, it was a faithful disciple of Lely, and two Van Dycks were not to be overlooked. Altogether it would have been a serviceable little gallery to any amateur collector, and interested me intrinsically, apart from my particular quest. As for that, I saw at the first glance what I wanted; the note-book undoubtedly had contained the beginnings of a catalogue. But why,

Heaven alone could say. Jackman, who accompanied me to the gallery, had now a bright suggestion in explanation.

"It must have been one of the tourists," he declared.

"What, have you tourists here — in this remote spot?" I asked, remembering my fly-man.

"Yes, sir; they come over sometimes from Kingsbridge or Plymouth," he replied. "The Castle 's mentioned in the guide-books."

"Do you get many visitors?" I asked, recalling now the man at the gate with his cigar, and the girl in the park.

"Not many," he admitted. "But sometimes in the summer."

"Had any lately?" I inquired, still with my mind on the young lady.

"Yes, sir — the last two days," he replied promptly.

"A lady?"

"Yes, sir, and a gentleman, sir."

"Together?" I asked.

"No, sir; separately, sir. And it 's my belief, sir, that the book belonged to one of them."

"Do you think the lady ventured into my bedroom to steal it at one this morning?" I asked mildly.

Jackman was thrown into polite confusion. "Well, no, sir; I don't know, sir;" adding, "perhaps it will turn up, sir."

I left him, pottered about in the gallery, and at last went down by the other stairway, which gave access to the courtyard. From the courtyard I blundered through a door which communicated by a passage with some furnished rooms; and soon perceived I must be in the quarters occupied by the Jackmans. This

information was confirmed by the sound of a man's voice, which reached me in a rumble. Rumble as it was, it had a certain agitant and minatory timbre that penetrated. It was of that sustained monotone that bespeaks the scolding. And suddenly there was silence. Trying to solve the riddle of my position, I broke into the kitchen, and heard the sound of the kettle singing and of a woman sniffing. I looked about, and found Mrs. Jackman with a handkerchief to her eyes by the table.

"Anything the matter, Mrs. Jackman?" I asked, and she started up with a cry. "Sorry I startled you," I remarked. "I 've lost my way in. I hope you 're not in trouble."

"Mrs. Jackman has the headache, sir," said a voice behind me. I swept about and met her husband's demure eyes. "She always cries when she has the headache."

"I always cries when I has the headache," sniffed the woman. I glanced from the one to the other. It was no business of mine, yet I was perfectly aware that whether Mrs. Jackman had or had not a headache, it was not the headache that had driven her to tears. I remembered the scolding voice; but Jackman's face was devoid of all anger, annoyance, or any feeling whatever. I passed on with the expression of a casual hope that she might soon recover. And Jackman piloted me into my own apartments.

But I was now for the sunshine that was moving among the May foliage. The short round drum-towers, between which the hall door swung, fronted a paradise of green lawn, spaced with many flowering trees and shrubs. Up one tower crept an ancient

wistaria, on which the lavender trusses were opening. Pink hawthorns were sprinkled here and there and the back of the lawn was gay with drooping laburnum. Lilac rose in embowered masses behind the borders, and the white and red candles of the horse-chestnut glittered in the distance. Yet for all these glories, the garden was not elaborate, but rather unpretentious. The pinch of its poverty showed in its flower beds, which were cheaply maintained by herbaceous perennials, none the less beautiful for that. It was a self-respecting garden, decently well-groomed, the economy showing through. It was lavish only in its self-sufficing blossoms, as an impoverished house may display marvellous heirlooms, descended from a more fortunate past. It could not keep pace with *nouveaux riches*, but was not ashamed of its shabby gentility. It had, so to speak, retired on Nature, leaving to the gardener the job of merely tidying up. His was no longer the work of an artist, but of a housemaid. Yet I would not have exchanged it for a thousand houses of orchids and ferneries and stoves. It grew out of doors and was acclimatized to its air and sunshine. It was as much a part of Norroy Castle as the orchard wilderness, as the long-grown grasses of the park, as the restless sea in the offing.

To this sea I wended my way, by a winding path through a wild garden, which eventually frankly merged in a copse. At the end of the path I found a gate in the wall, and opening it I came out on the sea front. The tide was running out, and betwixt the demesne of the Castle and the receding water was a space of broken rocks and sand. I picked my way to the very edge of the sea, and wheeled my eyes in a semicircle from shore

to shore. Eastward a bluff terminated my view, but to the west I could see the rocks rise into a cliff, on which the waters of the Channel still broke with spray. I moved eastward, till I had reached the bluff, and here I caught sight of two men. As they were the only human beings in sight, I gave them the more attention. One was tall, slight and swarthy, and the other of an extreme disparity, being short, rather fair, and somewhat stout. They were conversing together, and gave me the shafts of their eyes when I hove in view. But immediately the little man turned his back upon me, an example which his companion presently followed. They began to walk slowly along the shore.

I am setting down the observations and impressions of this, my first day in Norroy Castle, because of the importance assumed by some of them later. The two walked along the foreshore at a little distance in front of me, and I idly noticed that the smaller man was dressed in some ordinary tweeds, and that his shoulders hunched up about a somewhat neckless head. But beyond that, and the casual recognition of an apparent distinction between the class to which he belonged and that of his companion, I remember no further impressions. I had eyes and ears, indeed, for the sea only, and so we covered the mile or so that lay between the little bluff and the mouth of the inlet. Round the turn of this was a tiny fishing hamlet of some dozen cottages, styled, I discovered subsequently, "The Point," clustering under a rise of the land; and some boats rode at anchor in the stream.

I took the road here that leads up the estuary, and a brisk walk brought me to the superior village of Southington, which I had passed the evening before.

I vaguely was aware that the two men had halted in the hamlet, and, still more vaguely, on thinking it over subsequently, I had the notion that they went down to the boats.

Southington I found to be a picturesque place, in the sunlight, set at a little height above the water, its cottages furnished with pleasant green gardens, and the village distinguished by a post-office in the grocer's shop and a tidy inn — "The Feathers." Down by the estuary was a small landing-stage and boats, and I soon got into conversation with a seafaring man who was lounging near. It seemed that the boats were his property, and that he let them to summer visitors.

"Do you get many?" I inquired, and gathered that they did not get so many as he wished. But he was a cheerful spirit, and enjoyed a gossip. There were two ladies staying at Mrs. Lane's, he told me with a nod over his shoulder, and a gentleman at the inn; another gentleman, he suddenly recollected, at old Mrs. Turner's. "But there 's time yet," he ended philosophically.

The waters of the estuary lapped coolly against the piers of the landing-stage; and the bright sun shimmered in the waving mirror, breaking into a thousand lights. The land here opened in a deep and generous fissure; across the water, half a mile away, rose wooded slopes, and it seemed to me that I could descry islets in the distance. To encourage my sociable acquaintance, I told him to reserve me a boat for the afternoon. I had come down to work, certainly, but I was no galley-slave to begin right away. I looked at my watch and found I had just time to get back for lunch. And so

I passed through the village and entered on the road that climbs the hill to the Castle.

You will conceive that I was not a little engaged by the odd circumstances of the night, including the mysterious note-book; yet I was not breaking my wits on the knotty puzzle. The day was too magnificent to waste on such a task, for I take it that sensation rather than reason is the prime avenue of happiness. Well, I was for sensation all the time, and, lest I should overindulge in dreaming, I must add to that, action. This my rowing excursion promised me. I returned to Southington in good time, and launched my fortunes. I put up the sail, which drew lightly, and under an easy breeze from the south I tacked up the estuary. I had resolved on making the village at the head of the water, but I was tempted aside to the wooded shores. This may have been destiny, or it more probably was chance; but at any rate it led to a little adventure. The foreshore descended in a gentle slope to the edge of the estuary, and was thickly grown with trees and bushes and briars, all in the early verdure of spring. As I approached, I was aware of a woman on a patch of sand who was waving her hands, and gesticulating wildly; also of a cry on the air. Was this beauty in distress? I gave the tiller a turn and ran in, beaching on the smooth shore.

"What is it?" I asked.

She came towards me with little quick steps, as though hampered by her skirts, which I noticed were pinned up above a length of pink unstockinged leg.

"There! There!" she pointed, her large eyes wide with horror. "Oh, quick; she will be drowned — and drift out to sea."

I stared; some distance out from the shore was a little boat, but I could see no sign of life in it. My gaze returned to the lady, who was wringing her hands.

"Oh, how can you wait and lose time? It 's cruel!" she declared.

"Please, let me understand," I urged. "What is it I am to do?"

"A lady — in the boat there," she cried breathlessly.

I turned again to look at the skiff. "I see no one," I said.

"She is asleep!" she bleated.

"Asleep!" I echoed, and momentarily questioned the speaker's sanity.

"Oh, yes, can't you understand?" she pleaded. "We rowed here, and it looked nice, and I got out, and she went to sleep, and the boat drifted off."

She positively wailed.

"But she can row back," I suggested.

She dramatically, even tragically, waved her arms to the sculls, that I now observed on the sand. "She has nothing to row with," she cried in despair. "We took them ashore, to make them safe." The idea had a certain originality, but I did not laugh.

"Oh!" I said simply. "Well, no harm 's done. We 'll soon pick her up." I edged the boat more conveniently to her that she might enter, and she saw my design, but drew back, suddenly abashed. Now that I had reassured her of her friend's ultimate safety, I think she remembered her tucked-up gown and her bare feet.

"No, — I — I don't think I will go," she stammered, "if you are sure you can save her."

"Certain sure!" I said cheerfully, and I pushed off.

My sail carried me down on the drifting boat pretty quickly, but I still could not see that it contained any one. I dropped the sail, and deftly manœuvred my craft closer, so that the bottom of the skiff was visible. Stretched out, with her head comfortably reposing on a silken pillow, her eyes shut to the green world and the blue heaven above, lay the girl I had seen on the previous evening in the Castle grounds. I recognized her at once, and wondered why. Had I come to note things more closely since my rustication? Even in sleep she had an individual grace, which, I should imagine, was hard to come by; but my experience is limited. My boat bumped gently against hers, but she did not wake, merely threw a delightful arm across the bronze wealth of her hair. I sat observing her. This must be one of the ladies who were lodging at Mrs. Lane's, and my distressed friend was no doubt the other. The boats grazed again, and her eyelids quivered. Then she sat up with a start.

"Why — what — !"

The exclamation passed into a look of dismay and fear, and that in its turn gave way to one of distance.

"I don't understand — " she began coldly.

"A runaway horse," I said smiling, "and no bit to turn it;" I indicated the land, and the intermediate water. A deep flush enlivened her face, as she gradually took it all in.

"I must have — been asleep," she murmured. "And you —"

"A lady sent me in search," I explained.

"Oh! Thank you!" she exclaimed in gasps. "I 'm so sorry! What a nuisance I 've been!"

I endeavored to lull that fear, but she paid me little heed. "Did you — are my oars — ?" she asked.

"They were carefully landed," said I, gravely, "and very neatly set together."

"Oh, that 's so like Isabel!" she broke out. "I suppose she was afraid some one would go off with them. She has a passion for neatness," she added, with the first smile I had seen her wear.

"Well, that being so," I suggested, "you will let me tow you?"

By way of assent, she silently passed me a rope, and I made the skiff fast. Then we ran lightly towards the shore. On our arrival no Isabel was to be seen. My waif raised a musical voice for her, and presently a muffled cry issued from the wood. I wondered if there was more distress, and if I was to continue being a knight errant. I did not dislike the rôle so far.

"Perhaps it 's a wolf," said I hopefully, and would have darted forward to the rescue, but her cool and decisive voice stopped me.

"I think I will go, if you don't mind," she said, and added, with a little dry sense of humor: "That is Isabel's cry of distress."

I waited, and presently she emerged again from the bushes, and came down to the boats. She searched in her own, and took out demurely a pair of stockings, equipped with which she silently walked back to the wood. I waited still, though I knew I had no right to do so. My duty was done. On her second return, I was busy putting her oars in the boat, in order to account for my stay.

"I am ever so much obliged to you," said she, in a

pleasant, informal way; and then seemed for the first time to realize that she too had broken out of taut and trim conventions. She put her hand up to her neck, down which the beautiful hair streamed untidily, but picturesquely, and refastened it without the slightest embarrassment.

"It was good of you to come for me," she said.

"I have often longed for such a chance," said I. "All my life I have indulged in dreams of saving princesses, and now I have awaked to find it true, thank goodness."

She dwelled on me fully and seriously with her eyes for a moment, and then replied:

"Here comes Miss Fuller."

Miss Fuller emerged, and we watched her delicate tread across the sand. She was tall and of a somewhat large frame, but by no means stout, save that her face, which was comely, was rather full. Animation kindled her expressive eyes.

"Oh, I am so thankful, dear Perdita, that it was no worse," she said. "It might have been, if this gentleman had n't kindly —"

"Oh, I 've thanked him," said Perdita, a little curtly, I thought.

Perdita! The name was music in my ears. Miss Fuller struck me as a little on the other side of thirty; Perdita could not have been more than five and twenty. I arranged the oars in the boat. "You will have a stiff pull against the tide," I said.

Perdita glanced at the water indifferently. "Miss Fuller rows very well," she said coolly.

"My dear Perdita, only when I don't catch crabs," explained her companion.

"If you will allow me, I can take you in my boat. I have a sail," I explained.

"Thank you, I think we shall do very well," said Perdita.

She was adorable to look on, but I feared she might have that terrible downrightness of the modern girl, which is a misapprehension of independence.

But Miss Fuller had clearly no hankering after the oars.

"If Mr. —" she hesitated.

"My name is Brabazon; I am living at the Castle," I explained, in the hope of giving my *bona fides*.

A glance shot between the girls.

"Oh, if Sir — if Mr. Brabazon would be so good, Perdita dear —" began Miss Fuller.

Perdita dear turned away. "Certainly, if you are tired," she said unceremoniously, and then, as if she remembered, "It is very good of you."

The skiff flopping astern, we set sail down the estuary. The breeze from the south still held, and I had to make several tacks to reach the Southington landing-stage. And when we were there, it seemed very natural that I should walk up the beach with them to the village.

At the gate into a trim little garden, with an overarching porch of honeysuckle and clematis, the ladies paused, and Perdita gave me a little informal nod, in dismissal. Her companion, more gracious, smiled kindly at me, and I felt her eyes still following me when I moved on after my salute. It struck me as rather a tame conclusion of what had promised to be an interesting affair. I had got no farther with Perdita's name, though I had the better part of it, and our acquaint-

ance ended abruptly as it had begun. The girl tantalized me, but I admired her gait as she passed up the pathway to the tiled cottage.

As my adventure had ended so early, there was nothing for it but to stroll home, and, as I went by the village pump on the green, I was aware of eyes bent on me from another quarter.

In front of a cottage stood a young man of middle size and spare body, in a rather assertive Norfolk suit, with knickerbockers of a loose riding pattern. The stranger, who was clean-shaven and had a mocking resemblance to a groom, gave me a friendly nod.

"Niceish day!" he commented.

Though I was the tenant of Norroy Castle, I was not proud, and, to say the truth, I leaned towards gossip in my solitude. I stopped, and returned his greeting.

"Staying up at the Castle?" he inquired, nibbling a twig. "Decent old place."

The terms were only roughly adequate, and to be excused because of the speaker's obvious limitations of vocabulary.

"Charming," I corrected.

"Glad you like it," he said briefly, and then looked down the road. "Tolerable looking girls," he observed, classing them thus sacrilegiously together. "But not quite my style."

"Ah, you fly high, doubtless," I remarked, with all my sarcasm in my voice and my civil inclination of the head.

"I suppose I do," he replied simply. "I like a flier — a girl with some go in her. That girl 's a bit la-de-da for me. Pretty, though."

Pretty! Why, the nincompoop interested me by his

very disqualifications. He spoke lazily, yet with the accent of one who has been brought up on that indefinable but distinctive plane of gentleman. Otherwise, he might have been a jockey, and should.

"She 's been here a week or so," he added.

Here was my manifest chance to draw my information from such an obviously amiable and communicative simpleton.

"A pretty girl," I assented, adopting his wretched adjective, "and no doubt a pretty name."

"Don't know her name," says this oaf, and added: "You seem a bit smitten. We can find out at the inn."

I had not come down from London to retain London manners. I was free and unfettered, king of my own actions, and in the country could do as the country evidently did. Nonchalantly I walked down to the inn with my new friend, who, before entering, peered in at a window, sticking up a single eye-glass to do so. It gleamed in a brown freckled face to one side of a large nose.

"Chalmers in!" he said, and entered.

Once inside, I was induced to take a glass with him, which, being warm from my exertions, I was not reluctant to do. We sat in a little parlor at the back of the bar, smelling rankly of stale beer and tobacco. The sheepish innkeeper supplied our wants, and my new friend bluntly made his interrogation.

"Who are the ladies staying at Mrs. Lane's?" he inquired. Chalmers did not know, but amiably volunteered to ask the missus. While he was absent, the gentleman jockey delivered himself of sundry opinions on women, which seemed to him important, and were to me entertaining.

"There ain't much in them, outside looks," he concluded, "and most of that 's dress. They 're regularly artful, you know."

Here was a fine cynic, say at eight and twenty! Anxious for further instruction and guidance, I asked questions. "This may all come in useful to me some day," I explained humbly. "One never knows. I gather you 've escaped them so far."

"If I had n't been careful, I should n't," he told me frankly. Never was there such a frank person. "There was a sort of arrangement about a cousin of mine — family arrangement, don't you know. I never had any hand in it, nor she, for that matter. It was sort of patched up when we were kids. But I 'm not taking it; nor, I guess, is she. At any rate, we 've never seen each other, and don't want to. I like my liberty," he was good enough to explain, "and I don't buy a pig in a poke."

At this point the innkeeper returned with the halting information that his missus thought the young lady's name was Fuller. Why had it not occurred to me that there were two? And that I did not want particularly to learn the name of the one whose name I already knew?

"Fuller," handed on my jockey politely to me, as who should say, "There, now, are you satisfied?"

Of course I was not, but I seemed at the moment too bashful to say so. I think it was the audience that silenced me. I was ashamed, all of a sudden, to go inquiring for Perdita like a police officer. So, to save the situation, I smiled affably, and turned the point on my companion with a wave of my hand.

"As we 're making out a directory, why not include yourself?" I asked humorously.

He eyed me, taking this in. "My name 's Eustace," he ground out, in his slow way. "What 's yours?"

"Brabazon," I completed the directory. "I am tenant of the Castle for the present, and glad to welcome you there some day, Mr. Eustace," I added, out of civility.

"Much obliged. Look you up some time, if you don't mind," he got out unceremoniously, and rose.

At that moment there passed the open door into the passage two men, and one glanced in. Their footsteps suddenly halted, and a whispered conversation reached our ears. I moved out with Eustace, and passed the two on the way to the entrance. Their conversation dropped. When we had got a little way from the door, I happened to glance back. The two stood now in the sunlight before the inn, and were staring after us; and one of them I recognized as the short fair man I had seen on the shore that morning. His companion made a step or two as if to hurry in our direction, but the little man's hand suddenly checked him.

CHAPTER III

THE DEATH WATCH

I REACHED the Castle between five and six o'clock and spent some time in exploring the orchard and the copse. Here I was sought by Jackman with the news that a gentleman had called to inquire if he might look over the picture-gallery.

"Did Sir Gilbert allow that?" I asked him.

"Yes, sir; he made no objections, provided they were respectable," he answered.

"Maintain Sir Gilbert's rule," I said, dismissing him and the subject.

The stranger was not gone, I gathered, on my return to the house, but I went straight to my own room and made some notes that had occurred to me in the course of my solitude. Here again Jackman intruded on me. There was another gentleman, — this time to see me. I threw down my pen in chagrin.

"What name?" I asked, wondering if some neighbor had called.

Jackman's silver salver held a card.

"Mr. Edward Joyce," I read. "I know no Joyce, and there's no address. However, show him in."

The moment he entered, I knew him for the second of the two men I had seen at the "Feathers." I gave him good afternoon shortly and awaited his communication. He was sleek mannered, and insinuating, and was elegantly clad in a dark lounge suit.

"Pray excuse me, sir," he began ceremoniously. "But it is my duty to leave this with you."

He took something from his pocket and held it out. I stared.

"What is it?" I asked, all unsuspecting. I had a vague notion that I had before me some commercial traveller with samples, or some wine-merchant's tout. He placed the paper in my hands, and I opened it, while he took up his hat and made preparations for immediate departure. My voice arrested him.

"Stay, what the devil is this?" I asked. "I'm not Sir Gilbert Norroy."

"You will find it all correct, sir," he said, closing his bag with a snap, and as if deprecating my outbreak.

"But, damn it, I tell you I'm not Sir Gilbert," I said, with some impatience.

He looked at me non-committally. I glanced again at the amazing document, which was no other than a writ for eight hundred pounds.

"Do you understand?" I asked sharply.

"Yes, sir. I understand you to deny that you are Sir Gilbert Norroy," he said evenly. "I have carried out my instructions, and much regret the necessity. And now I'll wish you good afternoon, sir."

"Look you here, my good sir," said I, aggravated into anger by his obvious incredulity. "This requires a little more explanation than you have given. You bring me a writ for eight hundred pounds and thrust it into my hands on the supposition that I am Sir Gilbert Norroy. I tell you that I am not. This is Sir Gilbert's property, of which I am tenant for a few months. My name is Brabazon."

For the first time he looked a little disconcerted.

"Brabazon!" he repeated weakly.

"Now, who are you," I went on, "to make this egregious blunder, which any one in the place could have prevented you making, if you had asked a simple question?"

"I represent the solicitors who are acting for th — for the creditor," he said rather awkwardly.

"Then let me recommend you, Mr. Joyce, in all friendliness, to go back to your employers," I said, "and bid them be more careful, if they do not want to face an action for damages. Good afternoon."

He hesitated, lifted his hat and bag, hesitated again, and looked at me.

"You are an unbelieving dog, Mr. Joyce," I said, shaking my head at him; "but they say an Englishman never knows when he is beaten, and I suppose I ought to respect that crass-headedness. Well, will you oblige me by ringing that bell? Thank you."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Mr. Joyce, as he waited. "But my instructions were very explicit."

Jackman arrived at the signal. "Jackman," said I, "this gentleman has got it into his foolish noddle that I am Sir Gilbert Norroy. Would you be good enough to tell him who I am."

"Mr. Brabazon, sir," said Jackman promptly, but with no special enthusiasm.

"And now, Mr. Joyce, pray do not let me delay you," I went on. "I've no doubt you have to catch a train."

He backed out awkwardly, with a stuttered apology, and I went to the window and watched him go. As he passed out, I heard the descending steps of some one

in the hall, and Jackman arrived to shut the door politely on me.

"The gentleman who was looking at the pictures is going, sir," he said in explanation, as he closed himself out in the hall to send off the stranger. The stranger departed in the rear of Mr. Joyce. I rang the bell again.

"Who was the visitor?" I demanded of Jackman, when he came. He returned from the hall with a card, which was inscribed "Mr. A. C. Naylor," with the name of a reputable London club.

I had been in Norroy Castle, you will remember, only twenty-four hours, and the current events had roused suspicions in me. There was the attempted burglary; there was the note-book; there was this odd mistake of the solicitor's clerk. But it was the note-book that was in my mind at this moment. I leap to conclusions easily, perhaps too lightly; but at least it is more amusing than waiting to be poked up with a pole. This Mr. Naylor had outstayed the light, which no self-respecting picture should endure. And what was there familiar in the cock of his head? At any rate, I would wrest all from life that life was disposed to offer, and I cared not a dump for dinner. I clapped on my cap and bolted after the stranger, just the moment that his identity flashed on me. I knew that Homburg hat now, set so elegantly askew with the correct tip. It was worn by the man whom I had seen as I drove up to the gates of the Castle on the previous evening. My mind connected him with the note-book with a huge interrogation — inconsequently, thank Heaven. I ran after him.

Once out in the open, I took to the grass and sped away in the direction of the gates. The light was

failing, as I have indicated, but everything was still clearly visible and would be so for an hour. I had the regiment of chestnuts betwixt me and the drive, and so broke into the meadow which ended my domain on that side, still keeping under the trees. When I reached the gates, Mr. Naylor had already issued and was going down the lane. But here I was brought up by an abrupt chain of new thoughts; for he was descending in a leisurely manner in the company of Mr. Joyce!

This was an association that even my flighty suspicions had not reached. Yet I will admit it opened a world of bright possibilities to me. I was seized with simultaneous rage and delight, and I began to track this pair like a panther. It was comparatively easy to keep beyond eyeshot of them in this meandering, curving lane, and tracked and tracker arrived at the village without disturbance. The two men sought the "Feathers," and after a little interval I followed them. The first person on whom my eyes alighted was Mr. Eustace, burying his long nose in a tankard.

"Hulloa!" he saluted me. "Have a drink." I declined, with a little distance in my voice, which he heeded not at all. "How are the ladies?" he inquired casually, as if he would suggest that I had been with them ever since we parted company; adding, "It 's infernally slow, is n't it?"

If it was so "slow," I wondered why he was staying here, apparently as a summer visitor, but I was naturally too polite to express my thoughts. However, I was not giving Mr. Eustace much of my attention; it was Mr. Naylor and Mr. Joyce who excited me.

"Is a Mr. Naylor staying here?" I asked the landlord plumply.

Eustace was raising his tankard, and at my question he lowered it again, and stared at me.

"No, sir," said the innkeeper, after due deliberation.

"Is a Mr. Joyce?" I asked, with further bluntness.

Eustace betrayed no interest. "No, sir," again said the man.

"They both came in just now," I persisted, nodding across the passage.

Eustace's gaze followed my finger, and remained there with its customary deliberation.

"Ah, friends of Mr. Horne's, perhaps, sir," said the landlord. "He had some come from Fairburn."

Friends of Mr. Horne's. I had not got very far. Who was Mr. Horne. I had my mental eye on the little fair man with blue eyes, and his head deep in his shoulders. Eustace was whistling cheerily. I got up, and was going out, when the door of the private room across the way opened.

"Landlord!" called a voice, a cultivated, somewhat effeminate voice.

The landlord bustled away to his guest. "That's Naylor," said I, confidentially to Eustace.

He winked at me. "Damned popinjay!" he said.

I did n't know. I had no definite notion about Mr. Naylor, but when the innkeeper returned, he kindly indulged our curiosity, perhaps remembering my questions.

"That gentleman 's going to stay to-night. It is Mr. Naylor," he communicated. "T'other 's going off to catch the 9.30."

"T'other," I took to mean Mr. Joyce. It was all very simple, no doubt, and I had already spent my interest

along with my suspicion. I bade Eustace and the innkeeper good night, and arrived at the Castle as night fell. Then I did my best with a belated dinner, for which Mrs. Jackman had done her best.

Jackman explained this to me humbly, and I apologized.

"The evening was so beautiful, and the country is so lovely," I said; and then I added, "Did Sir Edmund always live here?"

"I believe so, sir," said Jackman. "But I never was here until after his death. Sir Gilbert was my master, sir; Mr. Gilbert, as he was then, before his uncle died."

"Sir Edmund was unmarried?" I asked.

"Yes, sir, rather a recluse, as they call it," explained Jackman; "a gentleman fond of books, though, and pictures."

I remembered the gallery again. "Those jewels and the plate ought to have been sent long ago to safe custody," I declared.

"Yes, sir," agreed Jackman. "Sir Edmund liked to have them on the premises, sir. 'T was his 'obby. They're family heirlooms, though the estate is n't entailed."

I was in the mood for investigations into the Norroy family, and after my meal I explored the library. I think I almost hoped for a repetition of the alarm of the previous night. But it was quiet enough and silent, and my candle illumined but a patch of its unruffled darkness. I rambled from bookcase to bookcase, quarrying with my eyes. The shelves provided a sort of dado to the gallery throughout, rising to the height of some six feet; and over these the pictures were hung upon

the walls. But at the further end, where the door into the strong-room showed, there were no pictures, and the bookcases had run into bays in which one might shelter from the rest of the room in imperfect light and book-worm comfort. But I had not traversed the whole gallery as far as this, when I wearied of my task, and, pausing before a little nest of topography, took out a volume with a pertinent title — "The Inlets of Devon." It was a shabby, faded book, published in the sixties, but I bore it away to inspect in company with two or three of its neighbors. The glorious May weather had rendered my fire unnecessary, but I sat for some time over my tobacco ere retiring, and dipped into the volumes. There was some matter of local interest in the book I have named, which included an account of the Southington inlet with a brief note on Norroy Castle. The range of that coast is pierced with many indentations, all offering promise to the romantic lover of scenery. I know of no coast-line so attractively broken as the shore of South Devon. But at Southington we were even more picturesquely retired than any of our neighbors, recluses from the noise and bustle of the busy ports and watering-places. Our little village in its isolation confronts and claims its own native sea, exercising an air of proprietorship which none can dispute, and indeed which there is none to dispute, unless, perhaps, it be the little hamlet of the Point. And so, according to my guide-book, this tract of country had been notorious once as a theatre for the operations of smugglers. "To that illicit trade," said the writer, "its inaccessibility and loneliness no less than the opportunity of its foreshore gave temptations; and it was reputed that the neighboring gentry

winked at the freebooters, if they did not actually participate with them, as sometimes happened during the eighteenth century."

I could quite conceive of the estuary as a charming place to run a cargo, and, if my guide was correct, the Norroys of the Castle had tapped many a keg of smuggled brandy, and strutted in handsome silks that had paid no tribute to King George. The Norroys I had already had the curiosity to look up in a volume of Debrett, while in town. The title had been bought, compulsorily no doubt, from James I, when he was seized of his bright idea for raising money, and had descended in a long and undistinguished line to my landlord, Sir Gilbert. So far as I could discover, the family had never emerged into notice but once, and that was when the seventh baronet, who had entered the army, displayed gallantry in the wars, which no doubt accounted for the gold plate mentioned by Jackman. Otherwise the Norroys lived and died unknown to fame, country squires, hard drinkers, big eaters, and, it seemed, illicit traffickers, deviating oddly into Sir Edmund, the lover of books and pictures. What had happened since his death, I could only surmise, but I had heard rumors, through an acquaintance, of a young man who had "gone the pace." Probably then, content with that single deviation, the family had resumed itself and its level. But as I had never seen my landlord, and only dealt through his solicitors in Chancery Lane, my surmise was but an hypothesis.

The Norroys in turn ceased to interest me, and I yawned, and looked at the clock. It was still early, but I was tired with the strong sea air and my exercise during the day; and so I went to bed, armed with a book

against emergencies. Yet I found myself unlikely to require that, so sleepy was I. Having undressed, I lay down, and, I believe, should have fallen asleep forthwith, had it not been for what I imagined at first to be the ticking of my watch. At least it merged in my ear with that sound, only seeming to come louder when my head was on the pillow. I might even so have gone off, had it recurred as methodically as the beat of the watch; but suddenly it stopped, and thus arrested my attention. I wondered, flung up my head, and listened. The watch on the dressing-table ticked on comfortably and dully and my head resumed the pillow. I was dozing off, when again the noise started, and this time somewhat louder, but now altogether refusing connection with the humble watch. I rose and listened. The noise ceased, and I lay back to hear it continue. Tick! Tick! Tick! And then ensued silence. I got up once more, and gazed about the room for a clock which might somehow explain the sounds. But nothing of the sort was visible. I went to the window and thrust open a casement wider, parting the curtains, and letting in the fresh night air. The sea mourned on the shingle a quarter of a mile away, and the light of a steamer moving homeward up the Channel picked out the darkness.

I went to bed again, and the tick repeated itself mechanically, monotonously. I was annoyed and aggravated. What on earth was it? I knelt down and put my ear to the floor, and seemed to hear it dulled and distant. Then I got into bed again and it grew almost sonorous. I set my ears to the wall and it had swollen in volume. Ah, I thought to myself, here is the explanation.

As I turned, almost satisfied, footsteps sounded outside in the passage, soft, list-slippered footsteps. I abandoned my riddle to the winds and sprang to the door. If this were my burglar again — !

But it was only Jackman, solemnly and softly doing the rounds ere he retired. He was more alarmed than I, and, as usual, was profuse with his apologies; after last night he had considered it advisable to see that all was well.

I commended his excess of zeal and called his attention to my mystery. He lay on the bed reluctantly, and with the embarrassment of a good servant who is made to take a liberty; and he listened. Then he put his ear to the wall, on my invitation.

"It's the death-tick!" he announced, with a fallen jaw. For the moment Jackman looked human, a creature scared and anxious.

"Nonsense!" said I.

"It's the death-tick, sir," he repeated. "Mrs. Jackman heard it when her mother died."

"Well, neither you nor I are going to die," I said cheerfully. "I'll tell you really what it is; it's the sound of a clock conveyed through the conducting wall. Quite an ordinary phenomenon. Is there a clock upstairs?"

"In the gallery, sir?" asked Jackman, and added his answer, "Yes, sir, I wind it up every week."

"Eureka!" I cried triumphantly. "Jackman, we've hit it. The sound comes down some sensitive passageway in the old wall. That's it."

Jackman did not look convinced; I could see he had fastened his fancy on the death-tick. I dismissed him and went to bed. I was nearly asleep when I suddenly

sat up with a thought. Why should the clock up-stairs beat intermittently? Why should it vary its time? And why should it vary also its volume? What a fool I had been to think I had the solution! Was it after all the death-watch in the wall?

CHAPTER IV

THE GODDESS IN THE CAR

OF course the death-watch solution of the riddle did not prevail in the light of morning. In what small proportions do the phenomena of the night appear when viewed in the life of the day! No sound was audible in the wall when I awoke, and the perplexities it had engendered stole away like the Arabs with their folded tents when the sun was up. To breathe that air infected the blood with gayety; the sea laughed now upon the shingle, and the full chorus of the vernal birds occupied the garden stalls. I could distinguish them all, thrush and robin and blackbird, the tits and the warblers, and afar that ghost of a voice, the cuckoo's, plaintive amid the elms. I bathed and dressed and breakfasted, and wandered on the sward by the tangled orchard, now full of white and pink apple blossoms, only to be interrupted by Jackman's report of a visitor. I ejaculated.

"What sort of man?" I asked, looking at the card, which registered the name of "Mr. Peter Toosey."

Jackman hesitated. "A gentleman about forty," he said.

He would commit himself to nothing else, beyond, "He looks something like an artist, sir."

Very well; I would see him, though I cursed him for the interruption of a pleasant train of thought. The

man was, as Jackman said, of forty years or so, had a short oval face, with high cheek-bones, a mass of rather long hair, a drooping moustache, and a watchful, modest eye. His voice was of a pleasant timbre, and his manner was at once shy and furtive, as though he feared a rebuff. I dare say my own demeanor suggested a rebuff. His business was put with some awkwardness, but amounted to a request for permission to copy some of the pictures in the gallery.

Now I will confess at once that this gallery had rather got on my nerves. Everything seemed to centre round the gallery. The burglar had exploited the gallery; I had picked up the note-book there; the man in the Homburg hat had stayed in the gallery to view the pictures long after the light had faded. And here was another man with a desire to enter the gallery. It might be an accident that the gallery gave access to the jewel-room, but I did not think so. I put some sharp questions to him. Which pictures did he want to paint?

He hesitated, stammered over his answer, and finally admitted that he did not quite know yet.

That raised my growing suspicions into a bristling crop. Had he ever seen the pictures?

With what appeared a singular cynicism, he laughed and admitted that he had not. I turned from him in impatience.

"I am only a tenant here," I said. "If you want permission, get it from the owner."

At the same time I resolved to write forthwith to the solicitors a word of caution. He appeared to be downcast and humiliated, but once he had left me, walked briskly enough away, as if relieved to be out of my presence.

But that was not the last I was to hear of the gallery that day. I passed a pleasant time out of doors, and in the afternoon made a second excursion on the inlet, resolving to settle to work in good earnest on the morrow. As it chanced, I went farther than I anticipated, visited a delightful wood across the water, and basked over a book in the sunshine. I got back about six o'clock and found a handsome motor-car before the door. It was in my mind for a moment that some friendly, or curious, neighbor had called to see if the new tenant of the Castle were respectable; but the thought had hardly flashed through my head when, entering the hall, I became aware of a magnificent vision in spring colors talking with Jackman. She turned as the sound of my entrance reached her, and presented me a full, pale face, surmounted by a glory of dark hair, a picture hat, and underneath these, moving, capable and meaning eyes. She swept towards me in a little rush that was impetuous and almost proprietary.

"Is this — Mr. — " she hesitated.

"Brabazon," I assisted her.

"Oh, Mr. Brabazon, I was just telling your servant," she went on with easy fluency, "that I wanted to look over your Castle and see your ancient rooms and the pictures. He was n't much inclined to let me, but I 'm going to appeal to the first authority."

Her voice, ringing, sure of itself, with less variation and more intonation, than English voices, indicated her nationality. I bowed. The gallery again! But this was clearly one of those tourists, who, according to Jackman, occasionally honored us with a visit.

"Most certainly," I said, wondering why on earth he who had admitted Mr. Naylor without a qualm, should boggle at this charming woman.

"That 's nice of you," said she, showing her teeth in a smile. "I 've driven over from Two Bridges, on Dartmoor, you know, and they told me of this. It was in a guide-book I had and they said it was a queer, antique place, very lonely, and that 's my taste. So I drove over in my car."

She was so gracious, so handsome, and so frank, that I thawed like a frost in the warmth of the sun. In point of fact, I loathe a frosty manner, and can only maintain one in self-defence for a short time. I know I beamed on her and the breath of a faint fragrance, stirred by the movement of her dress, came to me. I thought of the brow that

"Looked like marble and smelt like myrrh."

In a sweet embarrassment, I myself ushered her up the stairway to the landing and through the corridor to the gallery. She had the effect of occupying the room, of its belonging to her, and incidentally of my personal intrusion. I could not keep up the air of ownership in that dominating presence. Her very graciousness had the significance of one stooping to confer favors or deal indulgent smiles. She chattered gayly, with many questions, and in every movement of her body one was conscious alike of her sex and of her imperial claims. It did not flow unobtrusively and silently as did Perdita's, but rather demanded your attention, perhaps unconsciously, or rather only instinctively. It had no incertitude as to its rights, which one would not have dared dispute. Such a thing of magnificence chal-

lenged admiration, defied appraisement, and almost silenced criticism.

I learned some interesting facts in my round of the gallery, most of which concerned my guest's personal affairs. She and her mother were spending the year, perhaps two years in Europe, and she did not know if that was to be the limit of their exile. It would depend upon their enjoyment. The matter of money never came into the conversation, and I think it was not considered. She was enthusiastic over old places and historic cities, had revelled in Plymouth, as the starting-point of her adventurous forefathers, and was proceeding to eat up the traditions of Devon. She believed they had bigger spaces than Dartmoor in America, but concluded that they had n't back pages behind them to any extent. "They 're just the new magazines," she volunteered. "You 've got all the back numbers bound and put away."

I mused over this apt description, while I indicated a back number in the portrait of Lady Claire Norroy. She was a handsome woman with a pert mouth and a clever, mundane air. Perhaps she somehow accounted for Sir Edmund, apparently the only member of the house who had broken with the dull traditions of the squirearchs.

My fair visitor expressed the opinion that Lady Claire had a temper, which was possible; but I somehow did not think she was interested, for I noticed her eyes sliding off down the gallery. She made a show of interest with the next picture, but again her head was diverted, and the shafts of her eyes slipped past me, as it were, to some distant object. And thus we made our itinerary, with a sufficient

exchange of talk, until we approached the bottom of the gallery.

"What lovely old books! I should just delight to explore among them," she exclaimed, and now once and for all her eyes jumped me so markedly that I felt no rudeness in turning to follow their direction. We had all but reached the bays of bookcases of which I have already spoken; and in the twilight of their shadows I saw, to my surprise, the figure of a woman.

My visitor gazed, and so did I.

I knew her at once, though her back was towards me, from something in the lift of that delicately poised neck, as it rose from the shoulders; and then I saw that she stood in a reverie, as if unmindful of us, and that her gaze appeared to be fixed on the oaken door that opened in the centre of the book-shelves into the jewel-room. My companion frankly went forward and stood by her with her native *sang-froid*, and Perdita started. The girls exchanged glances, and Perdita turned.

"Would n't you like this old room just set down in your house?" asked my American visitor genially.

Perdita hesitated. "Yes," she said with a little smile on her lips, and then gave me a decided but formal bow.

The American took it for granted that we should now move on in company. I think that remark of hers was, in her eyes, quite as much introduction as was necessary. Royalty has its prerogatives. She kept up a flow of conversation, partly addressed to me, and though the English girl said little, she *did* accompany us.

We made the round, and I offered tea, which was accepted by the one, and declined by the other. But

the refusal changed the American girl's decision, not in the least, I gathered, out of any ridiculous prudery, but merely because a new thought cut across the proposal and her acceptance.

"Oh, let me take you along, if you 're going my way," she exclaimed to Perdita. "I 've got a car outside."

Perdita made her characteristic little pause. "It is kind of you," she said, by way of acquiescence.

It was not till then, and as I was on the point of losing them both, that I recollected I did not know the names of either. I took a bold leap.

"The master of this ancient domain has provided a book which he begs his visitors to honor with their names," I said elaborately. "As I am his temporary custodian, will you be so good —"

Perdita cast a quick glance at my face, and the American smiled affably.

"I should love to," she said indulgently.

I bolted into my own private room, and rummaged among my papers. But nothing like a book could I discover. Feverishly I scrambled my fingers along a shelf, hunting in dismay, and was giving up the search in despair, when I brushed something on to the floor with a clap. I opened it, saw it was scribbled in, but waited no longer and ran to the hall, turning the pages as I ran till I came to a blank space.

"Now," I cried triumphantly, as I set my capture down upon the table in the hall. "Sorry to keep you, but I 'm not familiar with my new possessions." I had taken a pencil from my pocket and handed it to the nearest of the two girls with interrogation in my eye. It was the American.

She sat down and wrote in a bold hand on the page I

held open, and rose. Perdita followed, but hesitated, pencil in hand, as if reluctant. She began, stared at the page, pondered, and continued; and when she rose her face was softly flushed.

"My!" said the American beauty, who had been examining the book, "what a funny book!"

"It 's — it 's very old," I said hastily, clutching it up.

Her full eyes regarded it with a twinkling smile of demure amusement.

"The proprietor could afford to buy another, I should guess," she said.

They turned to go and the American put out her hand.

"It was good of you to see me through," she remarked. "I 'd like to come again. We 're only at Two Bridges."

I told her how charmed I should be, and watched them drive off in the panting, luxurious car. Then I looked at my book and read:

Christobel Harvey. New York.

P. Forrest. London.

That initial annoyed me. Why not Perdita, with the unself-conscious frankness of Miss Harvey? And why that false pride and shrinking from a trivial performance? Oh, well, I considered, girls were a puzzle from their earliest years. How much did they know and how little? And a woman has an amazing gift of ignorance. She can stare facts in the face and walk by without noticing them. She "cuts" facts that are unpleasant as she would acquaintances. She has no intellectual honesty, which helps to keep her happy. And her knowledge of life, if she have so much, is never realiza-

tion; it is about on the level with a parrot swearing, or a child gabbling poetry. The significance, the real meaning, wholly escapes her.

I don't know why I indulged in these caustic reflections on women as I watched the tail of the car vanish; and equally I do not know why I was suddenly arrested in those reflections, by being shunted irresponsibly on to another and most discomforting track. Like a flash I began to piece fragments of events together. Two more visitors to the gallery, and I had not so far remembered to be suspicious. But I was. Suspicion leaped into flame. What was Miss Forrest doing by the jewel door, and why did Miss Harvey display so much interest in an insignificant country picture-gallery? Allowing for transatlantic unconventionality, there was still something startling in the abrupt way she had made friends with the English girl. What, my suspicious soul panted, what if they were not strangers to each other?

They had gone off together. I would have given a great deal to be able to follow them, as I had followed Mr. Naylor and Mr. Joyce the day before. I gazed hopelessly at the book I held in my hand, and I do not think I was even amused when I saw it to be a washing book of Mrs. Jackman's. At least I was not diverted then, for I was thinking of various threads which united instinctively in my mind. They concerned Naylor and Joyce and the burglar and Miss Forrest and Miss Harvey and the artist and — yes, I threw in Eustace also. I seemed to be the focus of a nefarious and far-reaching plot, and I could not doubt at what it was aimed.

I went straight inside and penned a long letter to

Sir Gilbert's solicitors, indicating the nature of my suspicions and mentioning some of the grounds for them. So much I did to relieve my conscience and my indignation; and after it was done and the letter posted, I felt better, and went out to enjoy myself. I renewed my acquaintance with the Southington mariner, and in his company made excursions on the Channel with an inspiriting breeze in my face, dismissing the Castle, the jewels, and the gang of conspirators to the winds of heaven.

During the next two or three days I made a determined assault upon my work. But I will admit at once that it did not progress very rapidly. For one thing, I found I lacked some of the books necessary for reference and I was delayed by having to send to town for them. In the next place I made the mistake of thinking I could work out of doors. It is a delightful experience, but it is not work!

I had a seat under the umbrageous waving pink chestnut and facing the lawn and flower beds, with the entrance to the Castle well in my eye some two hundred yards away, across an intervening shrubbery of rhododendrons. Nothing happened in the meantime and I began to feel a little ashamed of my untoward suspicions. In the distance I caught sight of Miss Forrest on two occasions, but it almost seemed to me as if she made an effort to avoid me. Of Naylor and his friends, I saw nothing whatsoever, and the only person in Southington whom I encountered was Eustace. I should have thought my manner with him was chilling enough to be obvious, but he did not appear to notice it. He was more than common friendly, and pressed himself on my company, despite my coolness. He com-

plained of being bored, and I wondered that he should do so frankly when the obvious retort was — why should he remain? He had nothing to occupy him, and I never saw him reading anything but a paper or a guide to the turf. The one thing he had, oddly enough, was a sense of music, and he played a fiddle with some skill.

But I gave him little encouragement during those days. I was trying to live in an atmosphere of my own, suitable for breeding ideas. Yet sun and air and sea and the perfume of the countryside somehow did not render assistance to philosophy; they rather induced vagrant and vagabond and incoherent musings, with no definite relation to my thesis. The sparkle of the water brought no illumination amid my wandering thought on "Studies in Earth." It woke in my heart only wild yearnings, passionate beyond logic, and dreams of enchanted islands and the long swell of Pacific seas. I dozed in a charmed slumber through those lotus afternoons.

On the third morning I heard from Sir Gilbert Norroy's solicitors; it was one of those abominable epistles which one can only receive from so-called business men, conveying nothing of sentiment or atmosphere, or anything but pure, visible, dull, and unimaginative fact. "Thanking you for your communication . . ." Oh, well . . . "Our client . . ." Confound their client . . . "is not disposed to see cause for alarm. . . ." Well, let his jewels perish . . . "Our client sees no objections to Mr. Peter Toosey's copying any pictures, provided, of course, his doing so does not interfere in any way with your arrangements."

I threw down the letter impatiently. Very well; let

Mr. Peter Toosey come and paint and be — As I live, Mr. Peter Toosey was taking me at the first part of my word at any rate; for out of my mullioned window I saw him approaching the entrance with his slow prudent step, his infernal long-haired head nodding on his breast. He paused a moment to admire the lawns, and then he knocked.

Mr. Toosey showed no signs of triumph in his demeanor; on the contrary, he was more resigned, furtive, and melancholy than I. He received my (or rather Sir Gilbert's) permission with humility, and expressed gratitude.

"Then shall I be in your way if I come this afternoon?" he inquired.

"Sir Gilbert has given you permission," I replied with sarcastic emphasis. "You are at liberty to come and go, provided the formality of knocking is attended to; otherwise, my dear sir, I take no interest in the matter."

I spoke untruthfully in my wrath; I did take interest in the matter, but the way in which my representations had been ignored was galling.

Mr. Toosey arrived and settled down in the gallery like a gypsy. He was there all the afternoon till the light faded. I was glad to see that Jackman paid several visits to him, though I was hardly prepared to endorse his verdict when I questioned him.

"He seems a very nice gentleman, sir?"

At any rate the jewels were not mine. Sir Gilbert might whistle for them directly for all I cared.

This turn of affairs, you may conceive, put me out of humor, but it was nothing to the next event. That night I thrust my window wide ere going to bed, to en-

joy the soft light of the half moon in a cloudless sky. Instantly I was aware of a shadow that fled on the lawn.

I might have thought this was but the trick of passing scud in the heaven, had not the sky, as I say, been notably cloudless; as it was, I knew it at once for a figure. I stood watching the shrubberies for some time. Bathed in a faint light, as they were, they might have veiled anything — any one — a veritable army. "And this," I pondered, "is the first fruits of Mr. Peter Toosey, no doubt."

I closed the window and took my candle. If Sir Gilbert's whole Castle were rifled, I told myself, I cared nothing now. Yet on my way to my room, I experienced a revulsion of feeling. I do not know that I recked a single straw more about Sir Gilbert's jewels, but I imagine the primitive instinct of the chase awoke in me. I went down the passage which led past my chamber and out by the door into the courtyard. From these bowels of the Castle, it was easy to get to the back parts to which the tradesmen had access, and by those channels I reached the garden and the open air. I stole in the shadows past the old orchard on the west and came out on a grass walk that encircled part of the southerly lawns. Shrubberies surrounded me, — laurels and laurustinus, ribes and syringas, and lilacs in a continuous profusion of greenery. I moved noiselessly and suddenly emerged into a breach in the hedge through which the moon shone. It struck whitely upon me, and my dim shadow stalked before me. Simultaneously some one got up on the other side of the shrubbery and darted across the lawn. I flew after him.

The man ran with the speed of a deer and dodged into the shrubberies on the farther side, where I lost him. At the same time I heard a shrill whistle, and this was repeated and echoed for a little distance. Evidently there was more than one of the conspirators at work. I ran a little farther, somewhat blindly in the shrubbery, and then stopped. I could hear nothing, no noise of any one running, nothing save the breaking of the waters below the garden. I had lost the burglar. I hunted in the ghostly spaces of the lower garden and the copse beyond for some time, but I could find no trace of any one, could hear no human sound. Irritably, and somewhat perturbed, I went back to the Castle and reëntered by the back parts.

As I took up my candle, I wondered to myself if one of the gang had gained the house during my absence. But I did not care. I went to bed.

Directly my head was on my pillow, the ticking began in the wall.

CHAPTER V

THE COUNCIL OF PERFECTION

I WAS now at the parting of the ways. The solicitors had discarded me and contemned my warnings, and yet I had clear evidence of a plot of some sort involving the Castle. The question for me was, whether I was to ignore it, inasmuch as it obviously could not affect me personally to any extent, or whether I should take up the gage of battle and run this gang to earth. I had only a dim notion as to who constituted it, and had but a guess at what it wanted; but, in passing through the picture-gallery next morning, I scowled on Peter Toosey as he sat meekly before his easel transferring Lady Claire Norroy to a second canvas.

"It's a beautiful day," he volunteered tentatively. I threw an affirmative at him, and then had qualms of conscience. After all, why should I suppose he was in the conspiracy? I looked back, and saw him nervously mixing his colors, and I returned, and stood for a while watching him.

"Beginning with a Reynolds?" I said lightly. "What after that?"

He nearly dropped his brushes. "Yes," he stammered. "I thought of the Claude next."

"A change," I suggested. "Are you going right round the gallery?"

"I — I don't know," he stammered. "You see," he explained uneasily, "it 's a commission."

Commission! Did any one pine to reduplicate the modest gallery of Norroy Castle? The man was a fool. I left him to his work and went out into the sunlight. In that divine air suspicions melted from me like morning rime, and of a sudden I experienced poignant remorse. Why had I suspected Miss Forrest? Madness could no farther go. I strode out, on the impulse of the moment, towards the gates, designing to go to the village, but when I reached the limit of my domain I was checked. I had no earthly reason for intruding on the ladies; and, moreover, the chances were that they were already on some innocent expedition of their own, beloved of women. I came out at the gates in this reflective temper, and found a man lounging there. He was a rough fellow, with a big frame, and a barrel chest, and he smoked an awesome cigar. He stared at me shamelessly, put his hands in his pockets and went on smoking. What was he doing there? He had no look of a seafarer from the Point, or of a villager. I felt certain that if I turned my back he would pop into the garden. I returned him his stare with interest, and he took this, or chose to take it, as a sufficient introduction.

"Niceish bit of garden yours," he remarked, taking his abominable cigar from his mouth.

I grunted.

"Reminds me a bit of Battersea Park," he went on affably, in his cockney voice.

"It's been modelled on it," I said. "We took no end of pains over it."

"Ah!" said he, complacently, without a sense of my sarcasm, "I thought it was like."

"Staying here long?" I inquired, intending more aggression and designing studious offence.

"P'raps," he said affably. "Bit of a 'olliday," and jingled his coins in his pocket while he surveyed my garden. I could do nothing with an insensate brute like this, and, reflecting that he could do no harm in the broad daylight, I continued on my way. Two hundred yards farther I pulled up, a prey to misgivings. Had I been treating a vulgar but innocent fellow creature unjustly? My mental outlook was sicklied o'er with the jaundice of my suspicions. I had terrified the artist, and probably incensed the cockney. I cursed the plot and the burglars, and increased my pace down the sloping lane.

It wound down the hill deliberately, now delving deep between high banks, and now running shallowly on the surface. Half-way to Southington, it ran into the copse that opens here to receive it, in a green environment of growing corn and grass. Turning aside, I admired the great elms, the thickening shade of the beeches, and the bright underwood. And as I stood so, my eyes were caught by a movement through the bushes. Athwart the copse by a grass track came Miss Forrest, the spring wind off the sea in her face. Her gaze was right ahead, as if she walked expectantly to meet some one, a smile opening her beautiful face like the dawn, and brightening in her eyes, her lips parted ever so slightly, budding with that smile. She moved gayly, like a child, and full of mere physical delight. I fell back in the shadow of the bushes, so that she passed without seeing me. I was smitten anew with pangs of conscience, with self-reproach and self-contempt. How dared I to suppose any wrong of so innocent and lovely a creature! I would at that moment as soon have suspected an angel in Paradise of complicity in nefarious plots. I watched

her out of sight through the wood, and continued on my way ashamed. Two minutes later I found myself confronting Miss Fuller seated on a fallen log under an oak. I took off my hat, and she returned my greeting handsomely, regarding me curiously, I thought, out of her large eyes. She was nice to look at, and her expression promised a fount of sympathy, if I knew anything of woman. I took my resolution swiftly as I am wont to do.

"Miss Fuller," said I, in a saddened and penitent voice, "I have a confession to make, which I beg you will hear."

She stirred with interest. "Indeed!" she said simply, but I could pierce that flimsy veil of indifference.

"Yes," I went on, launching myself, "I want you to make my peace with Miss Forrest."

"Forrest!" she echoed blankly.

"Yes, your friend, Miss Forrest," I said.

"Oh, yes," she said quickly. "You mean Miss Forrest," and displayed signs of agitation out of keeping with the circumstances.

"The fact is," I continued manfully, "I have done her a grievous injustice. I thought she was a burglar."

"A burglar!" exclaimed Miss Fuller on a high crescendo, opening her wide eyes wider. "Good gracious! Why — how —"

"My dear lady," I said in all humility, "I have no excuses and no explanations. I merely confess, and offer my apologies — to you first as proxy; and perhaps I may be permitted later to own up to the injured lady herself. Who knows?"

Miss Fuller hesitated. "I can't think how you came to make such a preposterous and shameful mistake,"

she said at last, with some asperity for so sympathetic a woman. "It was — it was unpardonable."

"Then, alas!" I began in a lamentable voice.

"But perhaps Per— Miss Forrest would forgive you, if you are really penitent," she added, with a touch of playfulness that seemed coy and arch at once.

"With your assistance, my dear lady —" I said.

She had risen, and now cast inquisitive glances at me again, as we began without premeditation to walk together through the wood.

"It has nothing to do with me," she protested.

"Oh, but it has," I urged; "I thought you were one of the gang, too."

"Me!" she screamed, and her face flamed. "Good heavens, how wicked of you!"

"You may trample on me," I said contritely. "I am here for sentence, but you see you are concerned in it."

"Whatever made you think such monstrous things?" demanded Miss Fuller sternly.

"I have been the victim of circumstances," I pleaded. "There is a story to tell, which I will tell, by your kind indulgence, to you both."

I felt that this was a very clever move; I should now be sure of my audience, and possibly of my forgiveness Curiosity would hardly stand so gross a test, not certainly in the case of Miss Fuller's marvelling eyes. She continued to walk, but said nothing, until she broke new ground.

"The Castle has pretty gardens."

"Yes," I assented.

"It must be nice to own such a beautiful old place," said Miss Fuller

"I dare say it is," I said. "I've not had the chance of feeling what it's like."

Miss Fuller started and colored. "Oh, no, of course not," she agreed hurriedly.

"But that gave me an idea. "If you have really done me the honor to forgive me," I went on, "you will further honor me by condescending to mark that forgiveness by taking tea at the Castle, and allowing me to show you it."

Miss Fuller's expressive eyes testified to her own desire, but she exclaimed lightly:

"That is for Miss Forrest to say."

It was then that we came out of the wood into a meadow already lush with the growing May grass. Regardless of injury to this, before us was Perdita, sprawling in it, her hat discarded, her bronze-brown hair tumbling about her face, and her skirts well above her pretty ankles. Hastily she thrust her dress lower about her feet as we emerged, and her face flushed delicately pink for a moment. I saluted submissively, while, the color slowly passing, she surveyed us with speculative eyes. The open joy had left her eyes, which were on me in a sort of challenging reserve. She had assumed the defensive armor of convention, and her look unmistakably demanded what I wanted. I turned to Miss Fuller appealingly:

"Perdita, dear," she said hesitantly. "This gentleman — Mr. — Mr. — Brabazon, wants to apologize to you for something."

Perdita made no reply, beyond that of her inquiring eyes, while I was only conscious of a bronze tress that was swaying on the white of her neck. I came to with a start and a rush.

"You explain, please," I said to Miss Fuller in a whisper.

"Oh, no, it's your affair," she said nodding.

"But I am unstrung," I pleaded. "Give me a lead, do, like a gracious lady."

Miss Fuller, good at need, hesitated, and confusedly yielded. "Mr. Brabazon wants to apologize for your being a burglar, dear," she said.

"What!" cried Miss Forrest, looking from one to the other of us. Miss Fuller retrieved herself.

"How silly of me! For thinking you a burglar," she amended.

Perdita still gazed in astonishment. "I'm afraid I don't understand," she said politely. "Perhaps it's an elaborate joke."

I was constrained to take a hand on my own behalf. "It's this way, please," I said. "I suspected you of being in a secret plot, Miss Forrest —"

Perdita's face was smitten of a sudden with dismay, almost with fear.

"That you were a burglar!" put in Miss Fuller breathlessly, as if anxious now not to be left out.

Perdita's soft bosom of white muslin rose and fell quickly. "I still don't understand," she said, in a lower voice that was somewhat constrained.

"It is a sort of story," I told her, "and if you will forgive me I will tell you the whole of it. But meanwhile I want to make abject and absolute confession. For a base and horrible and unashamed quarter of an hour I did think you might be part of a plot."

"A plot!" she exclaimed in bewilderment.

"Ah, that's my story. And if after my confession you will deign to take tea with me at the Castle, I will

unfold that story. I think, on the whole, it is really worth hearing. Of course it would be more worth hearing, if you were still in it."

Perdita looked at Miss Fuller perplexedly, and Miss Fuller's eyes signalled back something. Then her charming smile captured Perdita's face.

"This may be a trap," she said, "to catch us, or to make us commit ourselves."

"On my honor," I assured her, "there will be no one present save myself and Jackman, my servant — at least that I know of. I can't answer for the spies."

"Spies!" she echoed in wonderment.

"That 's my story," said I firmly.

I knew now I had her, had them both in fact. The word spies sent a thrill through Miss Fuller, as I could see in the glance she wheeled on me. She looked at Perdita. Perdita refused to meet her eyes.

"This afternoon," I appended, in my confidence.

Perdita suddenly laughed. "I suppose we are all mad," she said.

It was surrender. I knew it. And it had all been engineered by feminine curiosity.

"Then suppose we seize time by the forelock and go back now?" I suggested.

Perdita got to her feet suddenly. "I'm sorry," she said, "but it is n't possible to-day." She looked at Miss Fuller. "We have some one coming."

Miss Fuller exclaimed. "Oh, I forgot! How dreadful of me! Miss Harvey."

"Could n't you persuade your friend also?" I pleaded.

"No," said Miss Fuller firmly. "It would n't do. We must go back now, dear. It's quite late."

I said nothing to this, as the case appeared hopeless, but I have the tenacity of a tiger when necessary, and the avidity of one, too. Also, on the trail I am a panther. I explained these characteristics of mine to Miss Fuller, as we went down the lane together.

"Really!" she said with wondering interest.

Miss Forrest listened politely, a demure little smile on her face. "But I don't quite see — excuse me," said Miss Fuller, "what this has got to do — I mean —"

She could not express her meaning for embarrassment. "These essentially animal qualities, Miss Fuller," I explained, "are combined in one who has absolutely no other claims to notice. But unfortunately for those whose company he admires, they obsess him."

Perdita bit her lip, as if she would thus refrain from laughter. Miss Fuller looked more puzzled than ever.

"How strange!" she said most civilly, but most blankly.

We reached the bottom of the lane where the village opens out, and Perdita broke her long silence.

"There it is," she said.

I looked, and on the village green was a motor-car. Harvey! Harvey! The name suddenly rang in my memory. Of course I recalled her now. It was the name of my American, and here was her car. So the girls had struck up an acquaintance, unless — But that last reflection was ancient and abandoned history. My heart plucked up.

We walked slowly towards the car, and, sure enough, the gracious vision who stood in its vicinity advanced to meet us with both hands.

"Why, I was just going to drive right after you, and hunt you out," she declared, greeting Perdita warmly.

"How are you this afternoon, Mr. — Mr. Brabazon?" she asked next, flashing her bright eyes on me with a winning smile.

A muffled choking sound came from the car, and we all gave it our attention. It seemed to have run over some one, and a hapless fellow creature, apparently in dying convulsions, lay beneath those juggernaut wheels. Miss Fuller's large eyes opened wider with horror.

"Oh!" she cried.

"It's only my new chauffeur!" said Miss Harvey, sweetly. "He would just try, and I bet him he could n't."

Bet him! I saw Miss Fuller look shocked.

"What is he doing?" I asked, as we approached the car and the wriggling legs that protruded from underneath it.

"I guess he 's doing nothing but swallow dirt. He 's trying to fix up some screws," said Miss Harvey, calmly, putting on her gloves again.

I glanced at the man who stood by me; here was manifestly the real chauffeur, orthodox in his leathern jacket. Who, then, was the tortured victim under the car? The chauffeur looked on with a complacent grin, and the wrigglings of the legs increased. An indeterminate noise, worse than before, reached us from the machinery.

"That 's the second time he 's died," I observed.

Miss Fuller shot an indignant glance at me.

"What 's he say, Inchbold?" inquired Miss Harvey.

Inchbold's grin fell from him. "I — I don't think he wanted anything," he replied in some confusion. "It was only a sort of exclamation, Miss."

"I 'm getting tired of this. Time we got on," remarked Miss Harvey, impatiently. "Can't you get him out, Inchbold? I guess he 's no good as a mechanician."

"If Inchbold took hold of one leg, and I got the other, we might manage it," I suggested thoughtfully, "particularly if some one, Miss Fuller, say, hammered his fingers to make him let go."

"Oh, how perfectly dreadful!" cried that lady. Miss Harvey laughed. But ere my proposition could be carried into effect, if it had been so intended, the legs gave a final squirm and then wriggled forth, disclosing a face all begrimed and greasy, but still unmistakably Eustace's. I wondered now that I had not recognized those soft-gaitered legs. I experienced at once a revulsion of feeling. What in Heaven's name did this suspect here?

He recognized me when he got to his feet, threw me a perfunctory nod, and turned his gaze straight on Miss Harvey.

"I 'd have done it sooner, if the oil had n't dropped in my eye," he said. "Half a dollar, was n't it?" He held out his hand bluntly, and Miss Harvey, full of laughter, took a two-shilling piece from her purse and put it in his palm. I scornfully expected him to touch his cap, but he did n't.

"Knew I could do it," he said cheerfully, putting the coin in his pocket. "There is n't much in this car business. H' are yer, Brabazon?"

I burned with secret indignation, though his impertinence was ludicrous. From the contagion of his impudent presence I felt I must withdraw the innocent ladies. My salutation was civil but distant, and I ad-

dressed Miss Harvey deliberately in front of him, begging her to honor me at the Castle with the other ladies. You will perceive that this had been my design all along.

Miss Harvey smiled graciously. She would love to; she had taken a tremendous fancy to the old place, and wanted to bring her mamma over, if she might. Of course she might. We exchanged friendly invitations, and the wretched, thick-skinned groom listened in a boorish fashion. It was at least a direct snub for him. In the end we all mounted Miss Harvey's car, and sailing off left the groom in the dust of the road, a dirty, smudgy, unintelligent-looking object, to whom Miss Harvey waved an indulgent farewell. He stood, staring after us with a dull, meditative set of his expressionless face.

"That 's a man," said I, to my companions, "whom I am persistently endeavoring to avoid. He clings like a burr."

"Oh, he 's great fun," said Miss Harvey, laughing.

"He looks respectable enough," said Perdita, kindly.

"He 's just a treat," said Miss Harvey, as we hummed up the lane. "There 's no man on the other side that would behave just as he behaves. He 's a unique specimen to us. He 's an English product only, and can only be caught in his native jungles. But I like him. He just says what he thinks, and so do I. It 's a treat after some of our fancy ways."

"An old friend?" I queried, with what I intended for sarcasm.

But Miss Harvey had no ear for sarcasm. "No," she said, pensively for her, "he just came right up, and asked me about the car, and said he 'd bet twenty

horses against it any day, with a bit to spare. And then he got fooling about the machinery, and I bet him he could n't put a screw right that Inchbold was busy about; and that was all."

I was not anxious to waste time on Mr. Eustace, and if I had been, my thoughts would have been shunted off him by the sight of the burly cockney still promenading in front of the gates. We flashed through, and his eyes carefully sorted us as we did so. He was still on guard, then.

A shadow of reserve fell on the ladies at tea, except on Miss Harvey, who maintained a conversation briskly. Perhaps some conventional scruple returned unbidden and unexpectedly to the others, a scruple with which the more licensed American was untroubled. And this was one reason why I recurred to my original device, which, you will remember, was based on a story.

"And now," I said, in my most preacher-like voice, "the time has come, my friends, for me to redeem my promise. And here begins the story of the thief and the spy, which, as you have not heard, I shall now proceed to relate."

"Story!" exclaimed Miss Harvey with interest. "Why, that 's lovely. What 's it all about?"

"My tale may begin, it you like, at the gates," said I, "with that burly scoundrel who stared after us."

"Scoundrel!" exclaimed Miss Harvey. Miss Fuller breathed deeply, and drew her chair closer, and Miss Forrest's eyes were interrogatively on me. A little color collecting in her face, she reminded me of an interested and innocent child, with excitement hanging over her. I began, and related, with some embroidery of circumstance for the sake of art, the events which had

occurred since my arrival at the Castle. I told of the intruder in the picture-gallery, of the dropped note-book stolen from my room, of the visits of Mr. Joyce and Mr. Naylor, and of the spies I had found surrounding the Castle. "You saw that man at the gates," I concluded. "He is one of them."

I confess that, if it had not been for the embellishments of my art, the story would have sounded a little tame, and fallen a little flat. For, after all, there was not much that had happened, and it was rather in the atmosphere that I smelled a mystery than in actual facts. But in my narrative I led my sympathetic audience skilfully up to the strong-room, and directed their fascinated attention on the plate and jewels. Miss Harvey emitted from her pretty lips what was almost a whistle.

"This is stirring," she commented. "You are having a live time." And then she looked at Perdita. "And you suspected her?" she inquired.

I hung my head. "Temporarily blinded by the glare of suspicion, I blundered," I said. "Please have some more tea."

"And where did you think I came in?" demanded the ruthless lady, with shining eyes.

"I regret to say I took you for a confederate," I said, with what firmness I could.

"Oh!" Miss Harvey's handsome face was rosy bright. "I should love just to be in something exciting like that," she declared unscrupulously.

"Have you any theory, Mr. Brabazon?" asked Perdita.

I shook my head sadly. "None whatever. The facts are more or less plain. Burglarious attempts have

been made on the house, with, I assume, the jewels in view. And it would seem as if the gang are watching the Castle. That 's all I know."

"But surely you will get the police in," panted Miss Fuller.

"There 's no doubt I ought to," I answered. "But after all, why should I? Let Sir Gilbert look after his own property."

The three girls exchanged glances, but I could not determine what thus passed between them. But they seemed to signal in this way to each other, as only girls can.

"And then — I forgot — there is the artist," I went on.

"The artist!" they echoed.

"Yes, he 's up-stairs in the gallery, painting. What does he want there?"

"You said he was painting," remarked Miss Fuller.

"Yes, but why do they all go to the gallery?" I demanded.

"Really, I think your suspicions are unreasonable, Mr. Brabazon," said the lady severely.

"Well, there 's Eustace," I said desperately.

"Eustace!"

"The man under the car," I explained.

"What 's he got to do with it?" asked Miss Harvey. "You surely don't suggest that nice man of being a burglar."

"I should n't wonder," I said moodily.

Miss Forrest and Miss Fuller surveyed me with wondering eyes; I think my gloom was impressing them against their will. Miss Harvey rose, and was the first to speak as she rose.

"Let us see this artist. Did you say he was upstairs?"

I assented. She picked up the eyes of the others; and simultaneously they made a movement for the door. I followed, feeling somehow that I had unchained forces which I was impotent to control. They were like Miss Harvey's motor-car. They rolled over me up the stairs. With misgivings I timidly brought up the rear, while Miss Harvey swept in the van like a conqueror.

Mr. Peter Toosey was painting. He was clad in dingy velveteens, smudged with the refuse of his palette, and he was painting as if for dear life. Miss Harvey greeted him with that gracious ease which never invites a liberty.

"What a lovely Gainsborough!" she exclaimed.

Mr. Toosey looked uneasily over his shoulder at her, and his terrified gaze shifted from girl to girl.

"It — it is a Reynolds," he said with timid truthfulness.

Miss Fuller elevated her nose and sniffed; Miss Forrest sniffed; and Miss Harvey turned round and sniffed in my face.

"I beg your pardon," I said, and then I, too, sniffed.

Mr. Toosey painted harder than ever, laying on his colors furiously, as if he were working against time. In his agitation, he painted out Lady Claire's nose, as if he feared she, too, would sniff.

The smell grew stronger. "Chimneys!" ventured Miss Fuller.

"No; clothes!" said Miss Harvey.

Suddenly Mr. Peter Toosey leapt from his stool with a little yell, and set his hand to his side. A stream of smoke was issuing from his pocket. From my place in

the rear-guard I hurried to his assistance, and between us we put out the conflagration.

"I feel," said Mr. Toosey, breathing hard, as he shook his fragmentary pocket, "I feel I owe you an apology. I took the liberty of smoking."

"If Sir Gilbert Norroy does not object, it is not my place to do so," I remarked.

He eyed me distrustfully, and the ladies, obviously in some indignation, vied with one another in comforting him. I strolled away, as if the affair were none of mine. Indeed it turned out that it was n't; for before I had examined more than three pictures casually, the party passed me on its way down-stairs.

"Mr. Toosey is going to have tea with us," explained Miss Harvey.

They had already had tea, and it was my tea, and more or less my house, but I had abdicated. Apprehensively, Mr. Toosey left the gallery under cover of the ladies. It was, as I have indicated, their affair, and consequently I did not inflict my presence on them for some time. When I did so, Mr. Toosey was obviously enjoying himself, though he shifted about like an uncomfortable schoolboy when I entered. He had a large piece of cake which he ate with some noise, in his hand, and, balanced in the other, was a drunken cup of tea. So far as I could make out, he was explaining why life would be better for all of us if we lived in caves and wore little or nothing. Neither Miss Harvey, nor Perdita, nor even Miss Fuller, turned a hair; they hung on his silly words as if he had been a musical prodigy.

"In Touraine," said Mr. Toosey, with an uneasy eye on me, "there are wonderful caverns which could be

taken possession of for summer holidays, you know. They could be rented for a few francs, and the Cave Cure could be tried. You see," he went on, forgetting me, and warming to his subject with a kindling eye, "how it would revolutionize all our holiday system. Mud cures, sun cures, grape cures, water cures, and the slap cure would all give way to the Cave Cure."

"What 's the slap cure?" asked Perdita, curiously.

"I believe it prevails in Bohemia," said Mr. Toosey, twinkling.

"And all the summer papers then would advertise: 'Cave to let — owner being obliged to seek closer quarters,' or 'Try our Caves for air and darkness,' or some such auctioneer's jimmy. And you could have them labelled Carlton or Ritz or Delmonico's, you know. And whenever a rabbit came by, you would scurry into your burrow like winking."

What had come to Mr. Peter Toosey? His tongue wagged on. I wondered if they had put anything in his tea. He entertained a rapt audience. And in the middle of it all, Mrs. Jackman arrived with a pressing request that I would speak with her. We retired to the hall, where I found she wished to know if the ladies were stopping to dinner. I looked at my watch, and discovered it to be late, though the serene light of the May evening had not warned us.

I told her "no," and saw from her communicative eye that she would like to have said more. But instead she left the ladies and got upon the uninteresting topic of soups, being anxious to know if I had liked my last soup, and if she should repeat it on another occasion. It was all very trivial and irritating, for I experienced a strong desire to get back to the room to hear Mr. Toosey.

And so I cut her short, and was reëntering when a pretty idea came into my head.

I went out into the garden, sought the western wall in the neighborhood of my own bedroom, on which grew a straggling Maréchal Niel rose. That glorious rose is invariably the first of its kind, and in Devon comes particularly early. I culled three choice opening buds in various stages, and turned away to go back. As I withdrew from the shelter of the wall, I had a glimpse of a figure stealing by the back of the Castle towards those rear parts which contain the kitchen apartments, and even in the declining light I knew it was Eustace.

The apparition angered me. The fellow had manifestly followed us. What did he there, trespassing on my privacy? It was like his vulgar impudence to press himself on company which had shown him that he was not wanted. But stay! Was it only idle assurance that had brought him to the Castle, or was he come for another and a baser motive? He had vanished among the shrubberies at the back, and I did not doubt that he was on his way to the gates, where his friend the cockney was probably on guard. What the devil did it all signify?

I entered the house in a puzzled and angry temper, and was greeted by three excited voices.

"Why did n't you tell us about the ghost?"

"The ghost!" I echoed. I had quite forgotten the estate agent's ghost.

"Yes, Mr. Toosey has been telling us about the ghost," said Miss Harvey. "Oh, I should love a ghost."

"Indeed!" I said coldly, wheeling a deadly eye on the hapless artist.

"Mrs. — Mrs. Jackman told me about it," he said lamely. Mrs. Jackman's tongue was a nuisance.

"Oh, well, there 's always a ghost, you know," I said lightly.

"Oh, but it explains everything," said Miss Fuller. "It 's the ghost."

She looked delightfully scared and awed.

"It must be the ghost," said Perdita.

"It is the ghost," said Miss Harvey.

I sat down. "Yes," said I, "I am disposed to agree with you. Your arguments are convincing. And that being so, I propose that we have a ghost hunt."

"Ghost hunt!" exclaimed Perdita.

"Yes; that we keep watch together all night in the gallery, and see what happens."

"Oh, heavenly!" said Miss Harvey, clapping her hands.

Miss Fuller looked dubious. "I — I don't think we ought to do that," she said.

I looked at Perdita.

"And I think we ought to be going," she said, rising cheerfully to her feet.

It was the signal. My guests rose; but at the door Miss Harvey whispered into my ear:

"He 's a most delightful character, Mr. Toosey. Don't you go off with any fancies about him. I believe he 's a genius. I 'm going to get papa to buy some of his pictures."

The evening fell as they went, with Mr. Toosey between two girls in the rear of the car. Jackman was laying my dinner when I went in.

"Jackman, have you seen any one hanging about?" I asked.

"No, sir," he said, staring, and after a pause went on with his task. His attitude seemed to ask an explanation.

"I saw a man skulking about the shrubberies behind," I said.

"No, sir? Indeed, sir?" said Jackman.

"And what is more, I recognized him," I said.

The forks dropped with a clatter on the table from Jackman's hand.

"Indeed, sir," he said, showing confusion at his awkwardness.

"Yes," I mused, "and I will be damned, Jackman, if I won't see it through," I said.

"Yes, sir," said Jackman, now himself again.

And in the diversion I had forgotten the roses!

CHAPTER VI

TO BE SUNG ON THE WATERS

I CAME to the conclusion that my charming visitors were right about Mr. Peter Toosey; he had no association with the unknown conspirators. They had gone direct to this verdict with the instinctive decision of their sex, while I was obliged to base my conclusion on dull facts and prosaic inferences. Perhaps Mr. Toosey had been alarmed by my opening attitude, and had written to the authorities. At any rate I received an intimation from the solicitors during the next few days, stating that Sir Gilbert would feel himself personally obliged if I would give Mr. Toosey every facility for his studies in the Norroy Gallery. This being so, it was evident that Mr. Toosey was known to Sir Gilbert, and that his presence had nothing to do with any plot which existed. I confess I was glad to be relieved of this suspicion, for I found my condition somewhat isolated, and, not getting on with my book too well, I inclined to seek company. I spent some hours on different occasions with Mr. Toosey in the gallery, and was interested in his combination of childish naïveté and weird knowledge.

In those days I had begun to forget that I had supposed there was a plot! For one thing, I saw no more of my janitor at the gate, nor were any signs of the other environing sentinels visible. The conspiracy

seemed to have collapsed. Mr. Naylor had vanished, and there was no one at the "Feathers." So I went on with my book, and I idled in the grounds, now in full spring blossom and rich with the approaching summer; and I haunted the inlet and the sea. I became very friendly with my boating man, Hawes, and enjoyed many an excursion with him. And on several occasions I met the ladies who were lodging at Mrs. Lane's.

It was quite clear now that Miss Harvey had struck up a friendship with the others, for I saw her motor-car pretty constantly in the village, and on more than one occasion the ladies were in company. I had some reluctance to press myself upon them, as I observed with chagrin a tendency on their part to draw off. Perhaps I was wrong in this interpretation of what may have been only pretty modest conduct, but I jumped easily to that conclusion. I must, however, except Miss Harvey from this statement. Her attitude underwent no visible alteration; she was as frank and friendly, as practical and as candid as ever. No self-consciousness checked her most impulsive or considered actions; and in gratitude I will confess that it was mainly due to her good offices that I fixed up the boating excursion to which I now come.

The estuary, throughout its length a broad creek of humming water, widens considerably at Southington, and an arm of the inlet penetrates the opposite shore as far as the little village of Baring. It was designed that our party of picnickers should visit this village, and eat lunch somewhere in the cool shadows of the wooded shore encompassing it. Miss Harvey had come from Two Bridges for the day, her mother having been

obliged to go to London on some business. Like most young ladies of her country whom I have met, she had her mother well in hand. But she was very kind to her, and announced her intention of bringing her over to inspect the Castle. I warmly supported this proposal, and went so far as to express a hope that both ladies would honor me at dinner as soon as was practicable. I gave this invitation not only on account of my admiration of Miss Harvey, but also out of deep cunning, as you shall see. On the day of the picnic, which heralded in the flaming month of June, I recalled my lost roses, and I made up three elegant nosegays, equipped with which I descended to the village. The morning was full of cool, flowing airs, and I drew deep of the sea with every breath.

As we made our departure for our point of assemblage Mrs. Lane's cottage, I was conscious of Eustace leaning over his rustic gate across the green, and watching us with interest. I think none of the others noticed him, for we passed down to the landing-stage in a pleasant chatter of excitement. Here I offered my tribute of roses, and was rewarded by cordial exhibitions of gratitude. Miss Fuller pinned hers to the yoke of her gown just below her shoulder, Miss Harvey set hers in what I believe is called her corsage, and Perdita inserted hers in her belt. I was a little disappointed by this distribution, but I will admit it had a certain propriety, and at least suggested differentiation of character. They say all women are alike; but there were impassable chasms between these three. I liked to hug the fancy, that, though the disparity of sex yawned between us, Perdita and I were nearer akin than the

others. She looked romantic, and I knew I was profoundly so. Was not the very flow of my thought at that moment witness to the fact?

Once in the free spaces of the estuary I raised the sail, and the sea-winds swept into it with a rush. Over heeled the boat and began to leap toward the distant shore. With the tiller in my hand I sat by Miss Fuller and Miss Harvey, while the wretched sail obscured my view of Perdita, but under the boom I could see the lemon gold of the Maréchal Niel in her belt. I put the tiller up, and we bounded over the freshening water, and cantered up the estuary.

"I don't wonder," observed Miss Harvey, "that all your sea-captains came from this little county."

"Yours," I corrected.

"I said yours," she replied, appropriating a familiar joke.

"Then ours," I amended. "Have n't you any affinity, and do you not claim kinship with Drake and Raleigh and gallant Sir Richard Grenville?"

"Oh, we 'll have Sir Richard," said Miss Harvey, enthusiastically, "who feared neither don nor devil. But I believe he was just a pirate, you know."

"Dover is the shire of the sea-rovers," I said, "and pirates and plunderers have always been the pioneers of civilization."

"Oh, Mr. Brabazon!" exclaimed Miss Fuller, reproachfully. "That 's an awful idea! I don't think any movement can prosper which is founded on violence and wrong."

"Sweet dreamland faces!" I ejaculated under my breath, but aloud I acquiesced. "Ah, history is strewn

with the bones of instances, is n't it?" I said. "What is life unless we perish for ideals? I 'm prepared to do so on the shortest notice."

"I am just chock-full of ideals, I believe," remarked Miss Harvey, thoughtfully. And here my Perdita joined in.

She had little undiscovered tracts in her nature that delighted me when I got a peep of them. She was capable, I had already noticed, of quaint breaches of her demure reticence, of sallies, of audacity such as all romantic imaginations must make at times, if they are not to be forever ridden on the curb.

"You are both sneering," she said. "I will not hear one word against ideals; it is only through them that life is worth living."

"Precisely what I say," I declared.

"Yes, dear, and idealism means romance," said Miss Fuller, eagerly.

"And romance," I continued, " means lo— "

Miss Harvey interrupted with a clear peal of laughter. "Business, of course," she said. "There 's no romance like that of business."

"Thank you so much," I said gratefully. "You just saved me from sentiment, and I hate sentimentalism."

"Do you think it 's the same thing?" asked Perdita, seriously.

"It 's the same thing in excess," I answered. "I 'm told that women's skirts are the better for some arrangement which will keep them clear of the body — wires or elastics — is it, Miss Harvey?"

"Pray don't ask me. I am quite ignorant of such matters," she said innocently.

"Well, the contrivance driven to excess produces the crinoline!"

"The crinoline was n't so bad; I 've seen early Victorian modes look really beautiful in Paris," said Miss Harvey.

"Do you think that crinolines — " began Miss Fuller, and, unexpectedly realizing the ground was delicate, suddenly lapsed in confusion. I was wondering whither crinolines would lead us, when, of a sudden, the sound of a beautiful voice rose above the whistle of wind and whirl of water. I started; but it was not Perdita. Miss Harvey was singing with amazing volume and certainty and clarity. And the appropriate music had come to her by magic. It was Schubert's "Auf dem Wasser zu Singen."

The water made a plaintive accompaniment to the words and the melody, as her wonderful voice rolled through the first verse.

> *"Mitten im Schimmer der Spiegeln den Wellen*
> *Gleitet wie Schwäne der wankende Kahn."*

"Please go on!" I implored, as she paused at the end of the stanza. I put the boat about, and she came up slowly into the wind, lapping on the tide. The sail rattled and slatted, and underneath the boom I could descry the roses in Perdita's belt; but her face was hidden.

> *"Morgen entschwindet mit schimmernden Flügel*
> *Wieder wie gestern und heute die Zeit."*

Yes, let us keep our to-days, and all times may vanish. We live, if you come to think of it, exactly between yesterday and to-morrow, that is, between prospect and retrospect, and to a healthy man the present should be

everything. Yesterday I knew not Norroy Castle, and to-morrow — no, ran my thoughts, I cannot give up to-morrow.

The singer stopped, and then — I do not know how it happened — I was looking not at her, but under the sail at my roses in a belt. Honestly I do not think it was my fault, for she had shifted her seat unwisely. But the bare facts are that the sail cracked like a whip, the boom kicked, and struck Miss Harvey as she rose, throwing her across the side of the boat. She hung there, half over the water, from her supple hips upwards, and Miss Fuller cried out in terror. The ribbons of her hat were deep in the fume of the sea. If it had been an affair of the boat merely, I could have amended it with the tiller, but she had lost her balance, and her feet rose even as I took in the scene and its danger. I left the tiller to take care of itself, seized her feet with one hand; and, leaning over, drew at her arms simultaneously with the other. To this day I do not know why we did not capsize. I think, the tiller adrift, the boat swung about on the other tack swiftly and strongly, and so saved the situation. At any rate, Miss Harvey came inside again with a little rush, and floored me in the bottom of the boat.

Her face was destitute of color as I extricated myself and her, and helped her into the seat near me, getting a grip at once of the wild tiller. Then she smiled wanly at me. "How strong and how clever!"

As I had gone down before her attack, I do not know that I deserved this, but I made profuse apologies, if so be it was I who had been at fault. But she was honest.

"No; I got up. I should n't have."

She shook her head weakly. Miss Fuller was as pale as she, and more agitated. It was Perdita who came to the rescue of our shipwrecked emotions.

"Have you a flask?" she asked me.

I confounded myself. I carried a flask so persistently and so uselessly that I forgot all about it. Now it had its chance; for this had it travelled with me for five futile years. Miss Harvey protested, but the "nip" did her good, restored the color to her face, and evoked wholesome laughter.

We reached Baring in due time, and ate our lunch and grew talkative and merry. Miss Harvey was merrier than any of us, and dominated our party. And as we sailed back in the late afternoon, she gave vent to her satisfaction in a deep sigh.

"There 'll never be another just so perfect a day as this," she said. "I don't mean your presence, Mr. Brabazon, though it 's nice to have you, but the day."

"Oh," said I, "if we are being honest, it 's nice to have you, too, but I agree with you; the day is the charm, not the human tenants under the canopy. Do you love spring or summer best?"

"The charm of your summer," said Miss Harvey, ignoring the question, "is that there is so little of it, and what there is is good. If we had old-world parks like yours, see how our sun would set over them! Oh, I do envy you your Castle, Mr. Brabazon."

"Sir Gilbert Norroy, you mean," I corrected.

"Well, it 's yours for a season," she said smiling, and the three girls exchanged glances.

I quoted:

> "'You are mine for a season
> But I am yours till the end.'"

We bumped gently into the landing-stage, and Miss Harvey's agile, restless mind soared elsewhere.

"I 'm going to pay a visit," she declared. "Ever since I heard of your suspicions of that poor man, I made up my mind to prove you wrong."

"I have no suspicions," I told her. "I am living in a fairy tale. No prince in a fairy tale ever suspects any one, and he always marries the right princess, or else there 'd be no story."

"Is that so?" she asked. "I thought it was going wrong that made the story. I don't like novels in which the path of true love runs smooth."

"What is true love?" I asked dramatically.

My Perdita and Miss Fuller were helping Hawes with the sculls.

"You know a good deal more than you say," flung back Miss Harvey, as she set out briskly up the slope by herself. We walked up to the village, and Miss Harvey's disappearance exercised us.

"Where has she gone?" inquired Miss Fuller.

"I think she 's developed a notion," said Perdita, and added: "She 's wonderful."

"Her energy is calculated to shock and shame any self-respecting Briton," I declared.

We halted by Mrs. Lane's cottage gate, and Perdita, with a gracious nod, fled under the arch of roses and up the pathway. Miss Fuller lingered.

"Wherever has she gone?" she asked, referring to Miss Harvey. The chauffeur was visible, wandering idly before the inn, with a pipe in his mouth. Therefore she had not gone to prepare for her homeward journey.

I shook my head; my gaze went past Miss Fuller up the stone pathway to a blank door.

"Won't you — won't you come in and have tea?" asked Miss Fuller, hesitantly.

I suppose I had forced this hospitality. She remembered, no doubt, that I had been host to their party and expected something in return. I accepted with alacrity, and we went up the garden together, Miss Fuller, I regret to say, showing signs of uneasiness and abstraction, which suggested repentance of her offer.

But why, I asked myself, should I be debarred from their quarters? I was fairly agreeable, and no more stupid than any other man, and I could vouch for my respectability. I could not think it was conventional prudery, in Perdita at least. I was resolved to enter, and I did, a little in the wake of my hostess. She had preceded me by a few steps into the crowded little rustic sitting-room, and ere I showed round the door, Perdita's voice was audible.

"Isabel, don't you think really, it was a little barefaced, specially after what she said about — "

"Dear, I've brought in Sir Gilbert Norroy — " broke in Miss Fuller hastily.

Perdita, whom I now saw in the window, drew back swiftly.

"Oh, would you like tea?" she said precipitately.

"I don't know about Sir Gilbert. Mr. Brabazon would," I answered lightly.

The two girls bustled about their hospitable offices, leaving me to wonder. What was barefaced, and who was she? Perhaps it was Mrs. Lane who had been at the sugar. But, no. It must be Miss Harvey. What then had that charming lady to do with anything barefaced? I gave it up, and drank my tea and talked small talk. In the clear light Perdita was tender and

vivid to look upon. She reclined in an old-fashioned rocking-chair, and we discussed the evening, the weather, and the scenery, — all valuable subjects when you are dragging for an anchorage. From scenery we got upon the Castle, and I spoke of Sir Gilbert. I can laugh as I remember how I spoke of Sir Gilbert. I gave my opinion of him frankly, while the two girls eyed me with interest and unaffected attention. Sir Gilbert, I conceived was something of a ne'er-do-well and probably rackety into the bargain.

"Do you know him?" inquired Perdita abruptly.

I confessed that I did not, but I had plenty of evidence against him. He must be a man of no taste, seeing he had neglected so picturesque a property for years.

"Perhaps he did n't know it was so nice," suggested Miss Fuller.

I pointed out that he had been there as a boy, and that *ignorantia legis non excusat.*

"Perhaps," remarked Miss Fuller, "he has reasons which keep him away."

"Reasons! Dissipations are the reasons of youth," I said with scorn.

"You are very hard on him," she said, without seeming to mind. "But perhaps you know best."

"No; I have theories," I explained. "I sit and brood in my lonely rooms, and try to materialize this landlord of mine. I think of lots of things in my solitude. Solitude is good for the brain, but I think it 's bad for the morals. I feel I 'm going down-hill."

"Please don't dissipate like Sir Gilbert," said Perdita, with a smile that flashed out.

"Very well, I won't," I promised. "But if my soli-

tude was not so prolonged and profound, I should find it easier — if I had visitors oftener, for example."

Perdita took no heed of this broad hint, but Miss Fuller cast what I took to be an inquiring glance at her. She rose.

"There is Miss Harvey," she said, gazing through the window, "and she 's with — why, it 's Mr. Eustace!"

I looked over her shoulder, and saw the pair pass. They crossed the green from the direction of the inn, and went boldly towards Eustace's lodgings. They entered unashamedly and in naked daylight.

Perdita's eyes fell on me, her lips trembling with a little unexpressed smile. I have told you of her audacious sallies; here was one. Her face invited me, if I could interpret it so far, to enjoy a point of humor with her. It was no use in the world appealing to Miss Fuller, and I got the notion that she never tried. I believe we should both have laughed out had we been alone together. As it was, our humors greeted civilly and went by. Perdita demurely resumed her seat.

"Whatever is she thinking of?" asked Miss Fuller.

"I hope she 's gone in to have some tea as nice as this," I answered. "And may I have just one more cup before you turn me out?"

"Oh, it 's stood too long," said Miss Fuller in dismay.

"I 'm afraid so have I," I said. I wanted to leave with the satisfaction of that mutual understanding. I made my adieus and went to the door. Perdita stood smilingly gracious and beautiful before me.

"Good-bye," she said, as she shook hands, and there was even a mischievous look appearing with the dimple in her cheeks. "I would n't be so hard on Sir Gilbert. He may be only a frivoller."

"I won't," I said, oblivious to all but her beauty and its proximity to me.

The chauffeur was still lounging before the inn as I went by; and when I reached the gates of my domain, there was the large cockney back again.

"Why, my friend," I stopped to say gayly, out of a full heart, "this is like old times. I wish I 'd known. I 'd have sent the carriage for you."

He stared, his mouth open in surprise; and then, as one suspecting himself the victim of a practical joke which he does not understand, retorted surlily:

"Come off it! If you do own the Castle, you don't the road, Mister."

"I 'll ask the cook to send out sandwiches," I said, paying no heed. He was a genuine cockney with the cockney's genuine spirit, and he changed sharply, and with humor.

"I 'll take sherry with 'em, Governor, thanks," he said, and as I walked on called after me "and a fiver for keb-fares, as I 've left me purse on the kitchen pianner."

His mocking laughter followed me, and I left him restored to good humor by his sally. I was not even giving him a thought, or the plot, or the burglar, or any indifferent matters of that kind.

No; spring was ripening to summer in the countryside. And spring was blossoming to summer in my heart. Of course it was folly, but all delight is folly, and to be midsummer-mad is the supreme delight. That dream of mine, drawn from vasty deeps of mind and memory and consciousness, was substantiated in a beautiful face, in a soft coloring, in bronze-brown hair, in eyes as vivid as heaven.

CHAPTER VII

THE ALARM

TWO days later, just after lunch, I was informed by Jackman that Mr. Peter Toosey would like to speak to me. He entered with several symptoms of embarrassment, one of which consisted of sitting on my hat, which, of course, ought not to have been where it was. But he at last found a vent for his voice.

"I think I can suggest an explanation of the events which have troubled you, Mr. Brabazon," he said.

"My dear sir," said I, at once arrested, "if you can, you have my eternal gratitude."

"Let us take it logically," said Mr. Toosey, gaining confidence, and spreading out a color-stained bunch of fingers. "One, the presence of an outsider, rambling through the rooms by night, discloses that there is something in the Castle which some one wants."

"That I will not dispute," I said dryly.

"Next," said Mr. Toosey, ticking off a finger, "the existence of spies, demonstrated by you by sundry tests, shows that the Castle is watched night and day."

"Granted!" I again accented.

"It is then obvious," proceeded Mr. Toosey, "that the spies are set to prevent something or some one from leaving the Castle."

"Let us suppose that," I agreed.

"Is it treasure? The treasure won't walk out of its own accord. It is therefore a man, with or without treasure. Some one, therefore, in the Castle is the object of their manœuvres."

"That sounds quite plausible," I said. "And it obviously is n't I."

"No, not you," he asserted confidently.

"Nor Mr. or Mrs. Jackman," I went on.

"Certainly not," agreed Mr. Toosey.

"Well, then, there 's yourself," I suggested.

Mr. Toosey was thrown into confusion. "I don't think that I am of any interest to the gang," he stammered. "I will admit I had n't thought of myself. I thought of some one else."

"In the name of fortune, whom?" I asked.

Mr. Toosey lowered his voice. "Some one concealed in the Castle," he said.

"But —" I began, staggered.

"What," suggested Peter Toosey, now alive with his idea, "what if one of the gang is already hiding in the Castle, seeking refuge from the friends he has betrayed?"

I pondered it. "Probably a member of a secret Russian society who has broken his vows," proceeded Mr. Toosey, warming, "and with a pack of bloodthirsty wretches on his trail!"

"It 's an exciting idea," I said.

"Or ruffianly members of the Camorra!" said Mr. Toosey, following up his advantage. "Or even Fenians!"

"If you are right," I said, "I will lodge a complaint with the Russian embassy, with the Italian Government, and the Head Centre in New York. We must stop it."

"Of course mine is only an idea," said he modestly.

"A very ingenious idea," I said. "We will certainly go into it when we have a little leisure. If we could capture one or two —"

He retired in a glow of satisfaction, promising to think out further ideas, and I went on with my writing. I was planning nothing short of a dinner party, in which four ladies were to figure. But now I had a happy notion. Mr. Toosey might assist me more nearly to balance the excessive numbers of the other sex. I was pleased with my inspiration as I penned my invitation to Mrs. Harvey and her daughter at Two Bridges, and to Miss Fuller and Miss Forrest at Southington. I secured Mr. Toosey as a guest before he left that day.

I had not, I confess, anticipated the downfall of my extreme hopes; and the Southington reply came like a blow in the face. Miss Forrest and Miss Fuller much regretted. . . . Now why?

Oh, well, I threw sentiment to the winds and gave way to my irritation. At least Miss Harvey was coming and bringing her mother, who "looks forward to seeing your ancient Castle." And Mr. Toosey would serve for Mrs. Harvey. Mrs. Jackman, all agog with excitement at this unwonted festivity, was doing her utmost. I rather fancied that Mr. Toosey had something to communicate to me on the afternoon of the day, but, fearing he had further developed his ideas, I dodged him, made a bolt for it, and stayed out on the water till rather late. When I returned I had just time to dress and get down to my arriving guests. The car brought the American ladies.

Mrs. Harvey was a woman of comfortable body, with a pleasant smile, and a wrinkled capable face.

She looked as if she lived alertly and briskly, yet let nothing disturb her, a combination we are hardly able to arrive at in these less fortunate isles. She was dressed as smartly as her daughter, and seemed to me to retain as much youthful fire. To my renewed astonishment, after his initial shyness had worn off, Mr. Toosey developed amazingly; under the influence of wine he blossomed like a flower, and delighted the table with his anecdotes and ideas. Encouraged by his audience he retired on stories of the Latin Quarter, during his youth, which began gradually to assume such weird colors that I hastened to intervene. I do not know that it was necessary, for Mrs. Harvey was sprightly with laughter, and her daughter listened without manifest distress.

"Mamma," she said abruptly across the table, "we must go to Paris this fall."

"Very well, my dear," said Mrs. Harvey obediently. "I dare say your papa can do without us till Christmas. I suppose you will spend Christmas here, Sir Gilbert?" she inquired, turning to me.

"If I were Sir Gilbert, I certainly would," said I.

"Of course, it 's my mistake," she said smiling.

"I should just love to spend a Christmas in an old-world place like this," remarked Miss Harvey.

Mr. Toosey, feeling he had had his day, was making up for lost time with the courses.

After dinner I conducted my guests through such portions of the Castle as were available, and they enjoyed the excursion all the more that Jackman and I were obliged to carry long brass candlesticks.

"Say, we should have all this lighted with electricity," observed Mrs. Harvey.

We were then in the picture-gallery, and there was considerable excuse for her remark, inasmuch as we were striving in vain to make out the features of Lady Claire.

"She 's a lovely woman," said Mrs. Harvey admiringly. Mr. Toosey had passed us, explaining to Miss Harvey at her earnest request how he painted.

"Then she was your great-grandmother, Sir Gilbert?" asked my lady.

She seemed to me rather muddle-headed, but I disclaimed the identity again politely.

"Oh, yes," she gave me a meaning smile, but I could n't fathom its meaning. "This is a pretty little property," she went on appraisingly, "but it would be all the better for improvement, would n't it, Mr. Brabazon?"

To my ears there was a perceptible emphasis on my name, by which I thought she was impressing it on herself.

"I should say a few thousand pounds would help it much," I said. "It 's been neglected since the present owner got it. I gather he has no money."

"But if he were to marry well, that could easily be altered," said Mrs. Harvey, and again I caught her significant smile.

"No doubt," said I, indifferently.

"That 's the way, I think, the world keeps its balance," observed Mrs. Harvey. "It levels up that way."

"I suppose so," I assented, following her notion which seemed to have an idea in it. "Stable equilibrium is best achieved as a resultant of divergent forces."

"I beg your pardon," said Mrs. Harvey.

"I beg yours," I returned. "I was thinking aloud."

"Well, if thinking 's going to help you any, go on thinking," said she good-naturedly.

"Well, we gain equipoise by constant adjustments. We should wobble over without them."

She looked puzzled. "I 'm thinking aloud," I explained again. "No doubt if Sir Gilbert were wise he would not come down with a crash. Perhaps he will be."

"It all depends on him," observed Mrs. Harvey, eying me. And at that moment it flashed on my mind that she was under an astonishing misapprehension. I stood silent for a moment, wondering how I should disillusionize her, wondering also how she had come to make the odd mistake. And behind these thoughts suddenly arose the dim and formless shapes of other and even stranger thoughts. I saw Miss Harvey and Miss Forrest and Miss Fuller through a mist of vague guesses and chances and hazy speculations. It was as if a nebula of doubt had suddenly sprung up and around me and them. How long I was silent I do not know, but thoughts are instant, so it may have been but a minute or two. I was roused from my reverie not by Mrs. Harvey, but by Mrs. Jackman's voice.

"Please, sir, a lady wishes to see you on urgent business."

I stared. "What?" I said.

"Miss Forrest, sir;" she paused, her eyes ardent with some emotion. In wonder and anxiety I turned away, with an apology to my companion, and followed Mrs. Jackman down the stairs. In the hall was Perdita in evening dress, a fleecy wrap hanging from her shoulder.

"You have come after all," I said, going forward

with my two hands outstretched. "Oh, how unkind of you to come so late, and how kind to come at all!"

"Mr. Brabazon," she began impetuously, paying this outbreak no heed. "There 's a man about the house — two men, I saw them — one came in at the gate, and there was another. And he was stealing through the shrubbery, and remembering what has happened here I thought you ought to know," she ended breathlessly, and my sentiment slipped from me, as her wrap was slipping from her, leaving her with white and beautiful arms in the dim light of the hall.

"When?" I asked.

"Just now," she breathed. "I 've run all the way. I don't think they can be here before me. I dodged through the meadow and through the lime avenue. They went by the shrubberies towards the back of the house. I saw them plainly in the moonlight."

"You brave girl!" I said, and put a hand on her shoulder. I was just aware that it was resting not upon her dress, but upon the supple splendor of her arm; and I am sure she was conscious of nothing save the invaders.

"They may have resolved to move to-night, thinking we are engaged and off guard," I said. "Thanks to you, we are forewarned. Now, you will let me give you a glass of wine?"

She declined, but I insisted, and I left her in the dining-room under Mrs. Jackman's care while I ran up-stairs. I gave Jackman the news and drew Toosey aside to communicate it to him. But my action excited the curiosity of Miss Harvey.

"What is it?" she asked. "Has anything happened? Do tell me."

It seemed hopeless to shut them out of our secret, as we should require all the available male assistance we could muster; and so I told her frankly. She seemed delighted.

"This is just a real Castle affair," she said cheerfully. "I can imagine we are being besieged by horrible and vicious enemies, can't you, mamma?"

I don't know if Mrs. Harvey was able to stretch her imagination so far, but she certainly looked uneasy. Her comfortable appearance vanished, and she cast anxious glances at me, so that I felt constrained to reassure her. The ladies accompanied us down-stairs and Jackman sought weapons in the kitchen. I fear we were not armed after Miss Harvey's heart, nor in keeping with our environment. We hardly did credit to a castle; for Jackman had possessed himself of a chopper, I was supplied with a rake, and Mr. Toosey was equipped with a Turk's head broom. Jackman's weapon was certainly formidable to observe, but I had my doubts if it would come into operation. What must happen next but that Miss Harvey should insist on accompanying us? And while we were demurring, Perdita, who had been conferring with her, expressed her intention of coming to point out in what direction the burglars had gone. With this accession to our attacking force it began almost to be safer to venture out than to stay in a dispeopled fortress; and I was on the point of inviting Mrs. Harvey also to join us. But Miss Christobel seized a carving knife from the table and walked out into the hall, thus giving us the signal for an advance. We opened the door and sallied forth.

I suppose we might have been considered a reconnaissance in force; for our object was to locate the

enemy and measure his strength. We went cautiously at first, all the more that the moon had gone in, and the garden was steeped in a vague twilight. Perdita kept close by me — perhaps it was I who kept close by Perdita — and Mr. Toosey followed, brandishing his Turk's head. Miss Harvey and Jackman, with the murderous weapons, brought up the rear. We stealthily crept along the drive to the avenue where the road for tradesmen's carts deviated from it towards the back parts of the Castle.

"This is where I saw them," said Perdita breathlessly. "They were going, oh! so quietly."

We diverged through the shrubbery, and beat it from end to end, but encountered nothing. Thence in a body we reached the rear of the house. Still no one was to be found. So we made a circuit of the north side, and came out by the tangled orchard. Jackman here bravely volunteered to reconnoitre, and we watched him become part of the darkness as he strode off. We waited five minutes — six minutes; and then a noise disengaged itself on the still air towards the left.

"It 's on the front lawn," said Miss Harvey in my ears, her carving knife tickling my ribs. "There, there!"

It was true. The sound of a falling body, as it seemed, reached us from the front of the house. I dashed off at my best speed, with some one at my heels, and along the path we raced in pursuit.

I jumped the gravel path that crossed our track and sped on to the lawns to the south. Before me I could faintly see a big border, and I swerved to avoid it. Immediately afterwards my foot caught in something, and I tripped, staggered, recovered myself and ran on.

A wild cry came from behind me; I turned half-way round in my course to look back, but still ran on. The tail of the moon lit up the prospect thinly, and I described in the distance a man making off at full speed. The sight stimulated me, and I increased my pace, stumbled again, and went down headlong. Recovering myself stupidly, I felt something under my feet, and groped for it. It was a wire rope stretched along the lawn.

The man had vanished, and I knew it was hopeless to attempt to overtake him. Behind me was a voice still crying, and I went back. A figure lying on the lawn met my eyes, and I stooped:

"Are you hurt?" I asked.

"My foot 's tangled," said Perdita's voice.

I disengaged her from the wire, put my arms about her, and lifted her with an absurd sense of joy.

"Hark!" said she, "I think it must be Miss Harvey."

Exploration led us to the second victim. We found her thrown with the impetus of her run into a bed of tea-roses, where she lay in distress. I raised her, too, gently.

"Please," she said, "be careful. These horrid thorns! Oh, I shan't be able to wear evening dresses for a week."

"Damn the wires!" I said savagely.

Perdita limped, and Miss Harvey uttered little distressful exclamations, and I looked about for further news. There was no sign of Toosey or of Jackman; but a shout came from beyond the rhododendrons.

"Wait here," I said to the girls, and I leapt the barrier of wire, and dashed into the lower garden. Almost at once I was seized by the legs and thrown heavily

to the ground, while a long stick was poked into the small of my back.

"Damn you, lie still — lie still, damn you! I 've got you!" yelled a voice which I recognized as Mr. Toosey's.

"Hold up, you fool!" I cried angrily, as I felt a feather broom sweep up my hair. "Hold up, you confounded ass!"

Mr. Toosey held up. "Lord, I thought it was a burglar!" he explained apologetically, as he helped me to my feet. I was too angry to retort, and marched off without a word, Toosey following, and pouring out his explanations and excuses. We had nearly reached the ladies, when in the midst of his apologies, he tripped and went over, saluting the earth with a solid dull bang. He scrambled to his feet clumsily.

"Oh, good Lord, I 'd forgotten my wires," he bleated.

"Your wires!" I exclaimed, turning on him.

"Yes; I wanted to tell you I had laid them this morning," he said triumphantly. "I thought it an excellent notion if they should come. And, by George, it nearly did for them. That noise we heard — "

"Oh, you blatant ass!" I cried, out of patience. "You 'll be the death of me. It nearly did for Miss Harvey and Miss Forrest. Oh, you inconceivable dolt!"

I turned away in high dudgeon, and offered my arm to Perdita, who after a momentary hesitation accepted it. Her ankle had suffered a strain, and she limped perceptibly. Miss Harvey volubly offered her opinion on the night's transactions, and Mr. Toosey had sunk below apologies. These, however, he resumed when

we had regained the house, and been greeted by Mrs. Harvey as if we had returned from the dead.

"I know I 'm marked all over," said Christobel plaintively. "Is n't there a scratch on my back?' she asked her mother.

"There is a sort of speckled one," said Mr. Toosey, looking over Mrs. Harvey's shoulder interestedly, "but not a large one, or very deep," he said eagerly.

Miss Harvey bounced away indignantly. *Injuria formae* had driven her to a feminine petulance I had never yet observed in her. She frowned like a thunderstorm, threatening the rain of tears. Perdita limped across to comfort her, and of a sudden I felt sorry for Mr. Toosey. I owed him something in compensation, for the accident had given me privileges, and I felt a barrier had insensibly gone down between me and mine. Forlorn he stood looking at the havoc of his handiwork, till I breathed a cheering word into his ear. Of course I dared not do it aloud. Mrs. Harvey also was being called upon to console her daughter. I believe she thought the injuries had been the horrible result of a contest with the burglars.

"It was n't a bad idea," I whispered. "But you should have given us warning."

"I — I intended to this afternoon, but I could n't find you," said Mr. Toosey, picking up, and added: "I should n't be surprised if one of those fellows is out there with a broken leg."

At that I had a revulsion; for Perdita's ankle twinkled in my mind's eye, and with indignation I recognized what it might have meant. His silly complacency infuriated me.

"Well, you 'd better make yourself scarce till they 've

got over it," I said inhospitably. "You 'll catch it if you stay."

"Perhaps you 're right," he sighed, and he slipped from the room like a schoolboy anxious to escape the master's eye.

As I showed him out, Jackman came breathlessly into the hall.

"Did — did you find any one, sir?" he asked.

"No," said I, shortly. "Did you?"

"No, sir," he returned promptly, "not a sign of any one."

I had one further consolation that night. I helped Perdita into the motor-car from which the Harveys were to drop her at Southington. Meanwhile I embroidered some foolish frivolity about the goddess's injured shoulder. She fretted frankly.

"If you guessed," said I, contemplating her from behind, "how wonderfully the scratch sets off your hues you would not mind."

She paused. "Does it?" she asked with interest.

I nodded. "Flaws only emphasize the nobility of a pattern," I said sententiously, "provided always they are tiny flaws. It is only by contrast that sheer beauty emerges at its best. Set a pretty girl beside a plain one — and see how she shines! And the beauty of an impaired surface is the lovelier for the comparison!"

"You think so?" said Miss Harvey, pensively.

"Yes, it is so. Mr. Brabazon's right," said her mother, anxiously.

"Why else did the fashion of patches come in?" I asked, "if not designed to throw up the perfection of an exquisite complexion?"

"That 's true," said Christobel. "But it did smart,"

she added with a smile. "I believe those roses of yours have more thorns than ours."

"Ah, they should not have pricked a rose!" I exclaimed.

Christobel beamed in her magnificent frank way, as a queen might extend a favor to her courtier.

"That 's just lovely, Mr. Brabazon," said she. "Why, what 's the matter with your face?"

The smile spread and broke into laughter. She laughed as if she were at a pantomime. I inquired of Perdita with my eyes.

"It 's rather dirty," she said gravely, but her gravity was a little constrained.

"Oh, damn it. It 's Toosey's infernal broom," said I, in a flash of surmise. "He brushed all my face." Miss Harvey still laughed, and a trickle of laughter came into Perdita's face.

"I don't mind," I said recklessly. "I took part of it out in a swear-word. And I 'll take the rest out in something else."

They did n't know, but I took it out in assisting Perdita into the car a little later. I ought only to have been a prop, or crutch. I confess I was more. I drew her by her slender arm towards me, so that she was forced to lean on my shoulder, and then I bodily lifted her in. For just a moment she swayed in the air in my grasp, and then her skirts blew back into my face, thrilling me. She thought she was going to fall, and clutched me, but she was n't. I set her gently down; but I felt her in my arms long after the car had vanished.

I felt her in my arms when I went to bed, and lay pondering the events of the night. But across this persisting consciousness a thought cut sharply. Why did

Mrs. Harvey obviously suppose me to be Sir Gilbert Norroy? And if she had fallen into that error, had her daughter also? And if Christobel, the outspoken, had —?

Back at this juncture flowed that delicious consciousness. And I believe I passed to sleep holding Perdita in my arms.

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE TRAIL

IT was but civil and friendly and kind that I should go down to the village next morning to inquire after Miss Forrest. She had been injured in a gallant endeavor to serve me, and I owed it to myself and her to show some concern for her. As I went down the winding deep-rutted lane, embowered in green, through which a skein of waving sunlight struggled from above, it occurred to me for the first time to ask how she had come to see the intruders. In the confusion of the previous evening I had quite forgotten to think of this, nor had she thought of explaining. And so I put the query as soon as ever I could with propriety after my solicitous inquiries. Her ankle, she said, was nearly well, and it had been foolish of her to make such a fuss. It had been Christobel who made the fuss, as you may remember. I wanted to tell her she was an angel, but I only slangily told her she had behaved "like a brick" — which seemed, however, an acceptable testimonial.

"Yes, and I was afraid," said Miss Fuller, with large impressive eyes.

"You!" said I, and then put my question.

"Oh, we had taken a little walk in the evening after dinner," said Perdita calmly, "and we happened to see the men at the gates."

"And I would n't go. Was n't it dreadful of me?" said Miss Fuller, anxious for my condemnation. "I hung about after Perdita had left me, hoping she would come back, but she did n't, and so I got frightened and went home. I ran nearly all the way."

She was bent on humiliating herself, and exalting her friend, but I thought Miss Forrest was not over-pleased.

"It was much more risky down the lane," she said indifferently.

"It was like entering the imminent deadly breach," I said lightly. "But now I must have the evidence of my eyes as to these ankles." Miss Fuller started and looked aghast. "I must see how you walk," I said, firmly, by way of explanation. Miss Fuller seemed relieved. Perdita made no sign, but merely smiled.

I insisted, and was not reluctant to lend my hand to the persuasion, and she yielded. She walked triumphantly to the door of the cottage, and looked back at me defiantly.

"Right out," I commanded. "You are concealing something in this half-light."

"Indeed, I 'm not," she flashed indignantly, and marched out upon the stone pathway towards the gate.

I followed, leaving, I am thankful to say, Miss Fuller in the doorway.

"You 're just a little bit of a humbug as a patient," I told Perdita, as I joined her.

"You are much more as a doctor," she retorted.

I looked back. Miss Fuller had kindly vanished. I have always believed that no one in the wide world whom I have ever met had so much vicarious sentiment as Miss Fuller. She was a thoroughly nice woman, and quite handsome.

Perdita leaned over the gate, observing the morning sights of the village, and I followed her example. Her face was of a fine clarity charged with life, and neither pale nor rosy. Like herself, like her gait, like every instinct of her spirit and body, it was vivid and brilliant, yet gave one the impression of restraint. Through her habit of life and convention only now and then did her large individuality surge up and overflow. As a maid she still kept it within gates, with the promise of a rare development. We talked at random, for I was thinking, and content to see her and think of her. And then she turned her full face to me.

"I wanted to tell you, Mr. Brabazon, that I thought I recognized one of the men," she said slowly.

I waited, watching the trouble in her eyes. "One entered the gate just before we got there," she proceeded, "and shortly afterwards another man followed. I recognized that one."

Still I waited. "He was a fisherman I have seen at the Point," she said.

"Oh, there are probably local scoundrels in it, whatever it is," I said.

"You see, we were in the shadow of the wall," she went on, without heeding, and still deliberately, as though she would rather not, "and he probably did not notice us. I could see him clearly, a tall, dark, lean man."

"Yes?" said I, seeing she had not finished.

"It was his furtive and excited air that struck me, and it was that made me suspect something. I thought you ought to know."

"It was more than good of you; it was courageous and fine."

"I ran through the meadow, and thinking I heard footsteps I hid for a moment in the dark shadows of the lime avenue. It was there I saw the second man."

She paused, and turned her eyes away; they rested, I noticed, across the village green. I followed them, and saw in front of Mrs. Turner's garden, lounging with his arms over the gate, Mr. Eustace.

"Did you see him clearly?" I asked quietly.

"No; not very," she said, seeming relieved that I asked no more. "It was more the figure that suggested it. Perhaps I ought not to have said so much; it was only a suspicion. But I felt you ought to know. He was hiding in the shrubbery. It was then that I made sure something was wrong, and I ran on to the Castle."

I was silent a moment. "It is all so strange that I was prepared for anything — even for that," I said.

She looked at me, grateful, I conjectured, that I had understood without words.

"I don't think it 's credible somehow," she said.

"We must take everything as credible, till it can be disproved," I replied. "I 'll devise some means of putting this suspicion to the test. We 'll only take it at that at present, shall we?"

"It would be a relief to me if you would," she said with a sigh. "I should much prefer it, and I thank you for understanding."

The conversation had drawn us closer, and I left her with a beating heart. I went up the lane, hardly aware what I was doing, and then remembered that I had a message for Hawes. I saw him, and returned, passing the "Feathers"; and, moved by an impulse, I entered the doorway of the inn.

It is a custom in English villages, a surviving relic

of ancient and more intemperate times, to interrupt the morning work by a glass of ale or stout. Oddly enough, men who will do this every day of their lives would consider an afternoon glass as a sign of dissipation, even of insobriety. It was between eleven and twelve, and several of the village tradesmen were gathered for their refreshment in the little parlor. It was not until I heard his voice from behind the stout grocer, that I knew Eustace was among them.

"I say, have you got any stamps?" he called in his frank, easy, lusty way.

The grocer turned, and disclosed him to me, where he sat by the mantelpiece, with a couple of letters in his hand, and a cigarette sticking by his upper lip. The innkeeper bustled to a jar to search in it, and, finding what he sought, held out six stamps to his customer, who reached lazily to take them. As he did so, one of the letters he held slipped from his fingers and fluttered to the floor, carried with a sidewise plunge past the grocer's legs to me. I picked it up, and handed it back, but the addressed side had fallen uppermost, and I could not but read it. I must have seen the name at the time, but when I cast my mind back that same evening, I could not recall it. That was of no consequence. It was not the name that struck me; it was the writing. It remained in my mind's eye with a familiar effect. Where had I seen it? I took my draught, and left; and half-way up the ascent I remembered. The handwriting was that which I had found in the stolen note-book the first night of my arrival at the Castle!

This unexpected identification brought me to a standstill; for I awoke from a course of thought to find my-

self staring with unseeing eyes across the hedgerow into a flowing field of corn. The discovery opened a whole world of possibilities and hazards. To say the truth, as I now confessed to myself, I had never really suspected Eustace of more than presumptuous assurance; but this connection of the note-book with him set him in darker colors. It associated him with the "ghost," with the intruder in the gallery, with the person who had inaugurated all my suspicions as to the plot. I was staggered by the revelation.

But after I had resumed my walk, my amazement gave way to a consideration of policy. In the face of this, what was to be done? I pondered the problem carefully, but I could see no road of definite and final action open to me. I had still no evidence on which to take proceedings; still I could not authentically connect Eustace with the burglar. I could, therefore, only play a waiting game still, but now one with an obvious clue. In a word, attention must be concentrated on Eustace, must be shifted from the present theatre of suspicion, and directed on him.

Somehow he now assumed in my eyes, quite against all principles, a position of greater dignity. He was not the mere lubberly horse jockey he had seemed, but the mainspring of a criminal gang. As such he claimed my respect for a cleverer man than I had ever imagined him to be. I took it that his superficial appearances and his bluff assurance were in reality astute disguises, and I wondered at the naturalness they had. At the same time I wondered also why I had not been perspicacious enough to see him before in his proper sinister proportions.

I was resolved to keep my eye on Mr. Eustace, and

I was confirmed in my determination that same afternoon by a glimpse of a figure in the lanes about Southington. Mr. Naylor had returned. He stalked along in a lordly manner, striking idly at the hedge with his stick, his Homburg hat correctly dented, and the smoke flowing from his fragrant cigar. From underneath his long lashes his feminine eyes swept my face, and resumed their modest survey of the fair prospect. I passed him as if he had been a mere rustic and not an obvious and elegant Londoner; but I thought the more when I was safe behind the Castle walls. Mr. Eustace had paid a visit to the house the previous evening with one of his confederates — I knew so much from Perdita. And here was his partner, no doubt, walking the hill in lofty indifference. The two facts augured some new movement. I should be on my guard. I fell into a deep reflection, and at last came out of it with a plan. But for that I must wait till dusk, and it was at dusk that I made an alarming discovery.

I had pity on the abashed and penitent Peter Toosey, and invited him to tea, when he discoursed with modest elegance on art. Thereafter we strolled in the garden in that delicious summer evening, and I displayed my borrowed demesne before his admiring eyes. Seeing his appreciation, I gave him the liberty of the grounds in a friendly way, and left him to his devices. I explained to Mrs. Jackman that I was going for a stroll and should not need supper till late, and then I set off. It was about eight o'clock now, and the light was still full and clear. I went briskly down the lane with the express design of discovering how Mr. Eustace would spend his evening. When I had reached the village I directed my steps without faltering to Mrs.

Lane's cottage, and marching up the pathway rapped on the door.

So soon as I was admitted into the parlor, to which the girls had just retired from their evening meal I had to find an excuse for my visit — for what I had to say was not to be said before Miss Fuller. That, at least, I had resolved — not only to keep a secret between us, but also to maintain our initial reservation of the delicate understanding. It was not, however, I found, difficult, thank goodness, to get rid of Miss Fuller. She was a most intelligent woman, and she faded away like a snow-wreath in June. I thought that Perdita seemed anxious to keep her, and I winced at that; but I think it emboldened me in my tactics all the same. I threw her a most significant look, which had the effect of arresting her attempts to retain her companion. We were alone.

"I did n't want to speak before Miss Fuller," I began eagerly. "I did n't know whether she knew about — the visitor last night."

"She always knows what I do," said Perdita coolly. "Of course I told her."

I might have been taken aback by this little snub, if I had not had some news to impart; and so I hurried on.

"I want you to allow me, if you will, to sit here for a little this evening."

Her fine eyebrows went up slightly. "Have you been burnt out of your house, Mr. Brabazon?" she asked with interest.

"No," I stammered, "but the fact is this window is the only place I know which commands the green, and I have reasons for wanting to watch it just now."

She looked at me inquiringly, and with an altered expression.

"I have something to add to your recognition last night," I said, weighing my words importantly; and then I told her.

She listened with a puzzled face, and then rose with a display of embarrassment. "I can't think you are right," she said. "Miss Harvey says he is a gentleman. She likes him very much. He plays the fiddle," she added irrelevantly.

"Nero fiddled," I reminded her, "and as for his being a gentleman, all I 've got to say is that if he is he succeeds in assuming the groom most triumphantly."

She seemed perplexed. "Of course you can, if you think it is right and necessary," she said. "But — " she paused.

I had not used the window yet, but I happened to give a glance out of it now; and I also rose, and quickly, to my feet. I might have been content to sit and argue and discuss the situation with her all the evening, quite oblivious to the gradual loss of the opportunity for which I was pleading. But that casual glance brought me back, straightened me, made me interrupt her abruptly and stare. For into Eustace's cottage across the green, was entering, at that very moment, no other than the sleek form of Jackman.

"Excuse me," I cried, and made a dash for the door. But before I reached it I had realized my impotence, and it flashed into my mind also that the window was still the best observatory. I went back; my face alight with excitement.

"My man has just gone in there," I said.

Miss Forrest started. "Your man! Is he trustworthy? Have you had him long?" she asked.

"I don't know anything about him," I answered. "He was Sir Gilbert's legacy to me. He has always seemed the pink of decency."

Over her clear face a cloud passed slowly, and she said nothing; her eyes dropped away from me. When she did speak it was in another voice.

"What will you do?"

It sounded as if she took no longer any interest in the matter, and I was disappointed.

"If I may, I will stay here," I said.

"Certainly," said she in the same voice. "If you want books there are some old *Punches* there."

She left the room at once, and I was too engrossed by the discovery of Jackman's perfidy even to wonder at the change in her.

Viewed in the light of this remarkable discovery, much that had been previously unintelligible was now easy to understand. Jackman was in league with the gang; and, now that I recalled it, it was plain that he had persistently put me off investigation. I remembered the adventures in the gallery the first night, and I recalled how my candle had gone out unexpectedly when I met Jackman. Again! A gust of wind had seemed to come from behind me when I was descending the stairs and had left me a second time in darkness. Jackman had been behind me; and I had wondered at the time at the violence of the wind on that gentle May night. Jackman, too, had offered on his own initiative to explore the orchard on the previous night, an unlikely proceeding for so mild a man, but one perfectly intelligible on the supposition that he was in league

with the marauders. I became indignant as I reflected, and I watched the house across the green with jealous eyes. It was a quarter of an hour before any one appeared at the door, and then it was Jackman who let himself out and walked across the green and up the lane that climbs to the Castle. Within two minutes of his disappearance the door again opened and Eustace issued forth. I jumped up. My watch had brought me so far an astounding revelation. I was resolved to continue the trail to the bitter end.

Eustace left the house and proceeded to the inn. Shortly afterwards I saw a horse being harnessed in the yard, and I guessed that it was for him. Leaving my window now with a tumult in my heart, I departed from Mrs. Lane's without seeking to take leave of any one and crossed to the "Feathers." By this time my guess had been justified, and Eustace, a cigar between his teeth, was seated in the dog-cart, looking the very model of a coachman. As he drove off I entered the yard and made my own request.

I will admit that my turnout was by no means so smart as his, as all I could obtain was a little Devon cart. But the pony was vigorous and willing, and rattled along the road at a very fair speed. Eustace had taken the road to Arncombe, the little town which is the station for our neighborhood, and I followed after. I sighted him on the outskirts of Arncombe, in the dusk, and saw him draw up at an inn. I handed my cart and pony into the care of a boy, and took up the chase on foot.

Eustace, with his long, leisurely stride, strolled towards the station, but did not enter. He passed on to a shop near by, and went in, while I waited in the

falling light. A few minutes afterwards he emerged with some letters in his hand, tearing open the envelope of one carelessly. It was clear, then, that he called for letters surreptitiously; and now his character darkened deeper than ever.

I walked in his wake towards the station, secure in the gloom, as I thought, against his observation. Just before we got to it I heard the groaning of the down train as the brakes checked it into the platform; and when Eustace came abreast of the doorway it shot out its passengers — a man and a woman first, a party of tourists happy together, and then two men a little behind them, the one with a bag in his hand. Suddenly I observed Eustace wheel away, and slouch off in his own tracks, a manœuvre that brought him back towards me. His act was entirely unexpected and caught me by surprise. He went by me quite close, but without paying me any heed, and as if in considerable haste. As for me, I walked on — I could do nothing else — and I passed quite close to the two men at whom, as it appeared to me, Eustace had shied. One was the little fair man who had previously been staying in the "Feathers," and the other, with the bag, was a stranger. They were eagerly talking together, and the stranger was throwing a hand out in the direction from which I had come.

This enhanced the mystery. I could have sworn Eustace had striven to hide himself from the arrivals, and I now was vexed at having lost sight of him. The two men had apparently seen him, and he was under discussion by them. What did it mean? I loitered down the road till I came to the place where I had left my pony-cart. The boy was waiting patiently, but I

left him there, for I had a sudden notion to look in at the inn where Eustace had drawn up. There was a bustle in the little stable yard, and as I entered a man rushed past me round the nose of a horse which was being harnessed.

"Look out, old man," called Eustace to me out of the deepening gloom. "I 'm off smart."

I had just time to step aside, and the horse, with his head drawn back, ramped by me and over the threshold of the gates into the street. Next moment Eustace was slipping briskly down the road on the return to Southington. I ran back to my pony, and, throwing a coin to the boy, jumped into the trap. I was not more than a few hundred yards in the rear of my quarry, but I had lost sight of him. I could hear the pounding of his horse's hoofs on the road, but the dark had swallowed him up. My little pony struggled gamely to keep up, but slowly fell back and soon I heard no sound of him. When at last I reached Southington he had disappeared.

I was now in this predicament. Eustace had fled from the men at the station for some unknown reason. Should I try to get on his track again, or should I await the arrival of the others, and confine my attention to them? I had a feeling that perhaps the latter course would be the wiser. If they were after Eustace I should thus kill two birds with one stone. As yet I had not stopped to wonder why he was anxious to escape their notice. I had been too hot upon the scent so far. But now I lost it at the "Feathers." He had alighted in the yard, where his horse was still smoking, and had left a few minutes before my arrival. Had he gone to his rooms? I dared not follow at the present development

of affairs, and the window at Mrs. Lane's would no longer serve me as a watch-tower. I might, of course, hang about the green on the chance of seeing Eustace, but I did not like the idea with its "long odds" against me. Should I wait at the inn?

That was what I did in the end. I want to set down the facts of this evening in exact sequence, and I hope they will not appear confused, which, I will confess, they were to me at the time. I waited at the "Feathers" until I heard the sound of a trap without. Then I went out. It was quite dark by now, and I could do no more than determine the figures of three men in a victoria, the driver on the box, and two others at the back. These latter got out, and I knew my conjecture had not gone wrong, when I saw that one held a bag in his hand.

The two men conferred a little, put a question I did not hear to the innkeeper, and then separated.

"I 'll find him," said one; and this was the one who strode off into the night. The second man entered the inn.

I did not hesitate. It seemed to me more important to keep the former in view. He was off in search of some one, and I was off in search of him. I kept steadily in his rear at a convenient distance, dogging him as I had dogged Eustace, and when the rays of a lamp from a cottage window fell on him, and revealed the sunken square head of the little fair man, I was not surprised. He went up the lane towards the Castle.

Now the lane, as I have said, was a characteristic Devon lane, running in parts like a deep gutter, overclosed with banks and trees above. And in our passage through this tract I lost him. He vanished absolutely, and no sign of him came back to me, to ear or eye. I

hunted the lane, and found sloping paths that ran up the wall into the fields above, and as soon as I was brought up against this my heart sank. If he had struck up to the higher ground he had certainly evaded me. And there was the copse a little farther. He might be hiding anywhere there. Again, he might have taken a short and private cut across the fields to the Castle precincts. As this dawned on me I became anxious to get home; and, abandoning all attempts to get on the trail, I hurried along the lane excitedly.

I reached the Castle to find my supper on the table, and Jackman with a suggestion of silent reproach on his face. And not until then did his newly revealed perfidy recur to me. I looked at him and wondered that so specious a man could be such a hypocrite. His mask of a face betrayed nothing, save concern for a hot dish which his wife had prepared and which had been kept against my return. His even tones degenerated not a shade into an expression of feeling. He seemed impassive.

I was not equal just then to dealing with him. I had lost both Eustace and the fair man, and I was tired and disgusted. Only towards the end of the meal I broke silence. A couple of glasses of champagne had consoled me, and brought fresh ideas and new hopes.

"Jackman, it is possible that we may be troubled to-night by our old friends, the burglars, — perhaps I should say the ghosts." I amended ironically. "You will be on your guard."

I looked him full in the face. "Yes, sir," said he, as if I had ordered a piece of toast.

The man was a consummate hypocrite and a hardened

rascal. But he was to meet his match, I thought, for once at least in artifice. He was in league with the gang and Eustace, and I knew it. Whoever came would be confident in the knowledge of a confederate within the Castle. And now the relation of the various parties began to trouble me. Was it possible that the men at the station were detectives?

I went out into the fine night and paced the lawn. The sky was clearing, and a moon was vagrant in it. Upon the shingle the sea moaned and raked. A fine wind blew out of the west. I thought of Perdita under the stars, and came to with the blackness of a shrubbery on the lawn threatening me. What lurked in that formidable stack of gloom? I turned away and went back to the house. The situation was getting on my nerves. I read for a time in the down-stairs room, and then moved into the morning-room which opened on the lawn. There was no light here, and I threw back the French windows and let the night breeze wander in. Without all was still and silent, except for the wind in the trees, and the water on the shore.

Suddenly this silence was broken by noises, by a sort of indistinct and distant clamor. I listened intently, and it seemed to me I could hear voices and the sound of feet as of some one running. And then the sounds faded. I pulled at the bell for Jackman on a quick impulse, but no one answered. I pealed on it continuously and could hear it jingling way in the kitchen quarters. Mrs. Jackman appeared now with a scared face, white like death.

"Did you ring, sir?" she asked.

It was the silliest of questions.

"Where 's Jackman?" I asked abruptly.

"I — I 'll see, sir," she stammered in confusion. "I — he 's — p'raps he 's — I 'll see, sir."

I knew now what I had wanted to learn, and I turned my back on her; for the sounds were again audible, and now they definitely resolved themselves into voices and running feet. I stepped out into the moonlight, and as I did so a dark figure shot across the intermediate lawn and vanished into the shrubbery. I gazed. It emerged from the shrubbery, took a flying leap across a pathway, and passed from my sight round the corner of the Castle. He had sped like a wraith.

Since my discovery of Jackman's perfidy I had guessed as to the means of entrance which the burglar had found. He came by the back, and his objective was naturally the strong-room. I went in, shut the window swiftly, and, going to my drawer in the other room as fast as I could, took out a loaded revolver.

Then I seized a light and went up the stairs noiselessly to the picture-gallery. I walked the length of this with the lamp in one hand, and the weapon in the other; but no one was visible, and nothing but shadows leaped out on me from the walls and bays of the library. The door of the jewel-room was shut. I came back along the western wall, pierced with large mullions, and set with portraits, and when I had gone half-way a noise stopped me. I listened greedily, and it came as the shuffling of a mouse in the wainscot. I was passing on when it grew louder. I paused again. It seemed to spring from the lower portion of the room. I retraced my steps, and stood flashing the light into the bays of book-shelves. The noise was still audible, but not so loud, and it obviously came from behind the shelves in

the wall. Acting almost on instinct I blew out the lamp, and the moonlight filed into the chamber.

There was a dull click, and the shelves shook in the corner; and then the light fell faintly on a yawning hole, and out of the hole crept a man.

I waited a moment longer, and then, stepping into the light, presented my pistol. The moon was full on my face.

"I say, stop a bit," said a voice. "Damn it, I 'm Sir Gilbert Norroy."

CHAPTER IX

ENTRANCE OF A MAN OF THE WORLD

I DON'T think my hand wavered, for the pistol was still at the level when the man took a step forward, and I made him out clearly. It was Eustace!

"Sir Gilbert Norroy!" I exclaimed. "Why—"

"Yes, old chap, I know," he interrupted. "But I'll explain. Look here, there 's some one after me, and I don't want to be caught. Can we get away? Do you mind? I've had the devil of a run for my money, — I ought to say some one else's."

He went to the window and stared out into the garden.

"Perhaps they've given up. I hope so. It's a beastly nuisance. I say, my boy, have you got a drink? I can do with a drink. I've had a twenty minutes' sprint, by Jove!"

I said nothing, but took him down the stairs, my mind busy with this strange new development. I could not fit it in with my theories and my prejudices at all. I was amazed and dumbfounded. It was not until I got down to the sitting-room that I spoke.

I poured him out a whiskey and pushed him the syphon. He drank deep of it, and as I eyed him narrowly I could see the marks of perspiration on his red forehead.

"Good!" he said, drawing breath. "Lord, I have had a trot."

"Perhaps, Sir Gilbert," said I in a measured voice, "you will explain."

"I can do a bit of it," he said. "But I want some explanation myself. I'm a bit foggy over it. Did you guess me?"

"On the contrary," I said, "I have been under the impression you were a burglar."

He laughed. "Burglar!" he said. "Good Lord! Well, I've been many things, but I'm damned if I've ever been taken for that before. May I have another?"

He helped himself without waiting for an answer, and looked about the room.

"It's all right, is n't it? he inquired. "A cosy place, if you like that sort of thing. Damned if those walls ain't damp. I could hardly find my way up in the dark."

"Sir Gilbert," said I, "I think you expressed a conviction that my desire for enlightenment was natural."

"Eh? Oh, all right. You want me to go ahead. It's a bit of a story. Look here, did I rattle you at all that first night?"

"It was you?" I asked.

"What do *you* think? Yes, I got in the usual way. I wanted to go through the gallery, and by Jehoshaphat," he broke into a broad grin, "you gave me a dance. I thought you'd copped me once, at the head of the stairs there; but old Jackman played up like a trump."

"Jackman, then," said I politely, "is in this business?"

"Jackman! Oh, yes. He was ten years with me in town; with the governor, too, ever since I was a kid. That was why I sent him down here. It ain't a bad place, is it?" he mused. "I don't know that I should like it for a permanency. Does the old chap make you comfortable?"

I was having my eyes opened. I could hardly spare time for consecutive thought. I could only sit there and get it out of him. This Sir Gilbert! I muttered some answer, and turned him back on to the subject he seemed to have forgotten.

"That's all right. I'm coming to that. I hope the old boy has n't come to any grief out there. He came out to talk when I came up after meeting that chap at Arncombe. I had a narrow shave."

This was merely maddening. What did it all mean? "Are you a criminal, Sir Gilbert Norroy?" I asked in my irritation.

He stared, and then grinned. "Did you think I was wanted?" he asked, and chuckled outright. "Not by a huge chalk. And yet I am in a way. They 'd be precious glad to clap a hand on me, and why the Devil they want to I don't know," he said moodily. "Anyway I 'm not going to risk the Courts."

"If I were you," I said, with elaborate sarcasm, "I would go on explaining like this, so that I can't fail to understand. It 's as simple as A, B, C, and I don't wonder children take to it."

He opened his mouth at me. "Don't get shirty, old chap," he said grinning. "I 'm coming to it. Look here, it 's only duns."

"Duns!" I echoed, and with a rush the whole building I had romantically been erecting on invisible foundations slipped into a welter of ruins.

"Yes, duns, my boy. They've pretty nearly diddled me to-night. Only I managed to dodge 'em."

"There was a man who tried to serve me with a writ so soon as I arrived," I said.

"Was there?" said Sir Gilbert, looking interested.

"Sorry. Yes, that was meant for me, no doubt. You see I skipped from London."

"Suppose you hang it all out to dry," I suggested. "If it won't hurt your feelings I should like to know."

"Oh, I don't mind," he said easily, and, feeling in his pocket, brought out a cigar-case, chose a cigar and lit it. "But I hope you have n't been rattled, old chap; I thought I scared you that night."

"You interested me," I said, "and I don't deny you've taken up a lot of my attention. But I don't know that I'm sorry. In fact I begin to think I'm sorry it's over. However, let us suppose I've been in distress, and that you are making amends by open confession. I think I deserve that tale, Sir Gilbert."

"All serene," said he. "But there is n't much of a tale," he added, scratching his head. "It's like this. When my uncle died I came into this little bit, but it is n't in my line much. Mind you, I hang on to it, for it's been in the family a tidy long time. But I don't much hanker after living here. I like things a bit livelier; what? Anyway, I did n't. But I went the pace a bit in town, and had to go to the Jews and so on. And at last it came to a crisis."

He paused, and sipped his whiskey. "That's why I let the place and went in for retrenchment."

"Why not have retired yourself to your own modest estate?" I inquired.

"Could n't afford it. I wanted all I could get. And my creditors were making things too hot for me."

"Then," I asked, "why — what is the reason you are here?"

Sir Gilbert looked at me with a quaint expression of shrewdness on his comical face. "The last place they'd

think of looking for me would be my own place," he said. "Besides I had another reason. But I gave out I was going abroad, and then skipped here. And, damn it, no one would have known I was here if it had n't been for that fool, Sally."

"Sally!" I repeated vaguely.

"Sally Jackman!"

"Then Mrs. Jackman is in it, too?" I said.

"I sent 'em both down from town. She was my mother's parlor-maid. Jackman was the governor's butler. They've known me since I was a kid, and, bless you, they 'd go through fire and water for me. But Sally's got a damn long tongue. She can't help it. And she let slip I was about to some of the villagers, and, what's more, that I was under another name — incog like royalty, you know." He grinned.

"Then that explains why I — " I began, a light dawning on me.

"They supposed you were me, old chap," said Norroy, laughing heartily as if it were a great joke. "Knew I was knocking round and took it I was you under a false name. Great Scott!" He roared with amusement, though there did not seem to me very much to laugh at. Sir Gilbert had a stable idea of a joke, as he had a stable idea of clothes.

I mused. It also explained Mrs. Harvey, and perhaps other things. I saw now in a flash that I had been Sir Gilbert in the eyes of the neighborhood. I turned to my companion.

"Then these spies hanging about, and lurking in the grounds, have been watching me, supposing me to be you?"

"Hang it, no — not all the time. I wish they had,"

he said aggrievedly. "They did at first, and I thought I was all right. No one suspected me. It just suited me right down to the ground, — I mean in regard to what I'd come for. But they were smart, smarter than I thought. And that's why I'm here to-night," he added comfortably.

"Well, I have n't heard about that yet," I said, with mild resentment.

"Oh, yes, I 'd better tell you about that," he hastened on. "You see I was going along all right, and chuckling to think the job had been shifted on to you. The chaps fooled about a lot, and there was one of 'em staying in the inn, and I used to feel jolly pleased whenever I stared him in the face, while he was keeping his telescope on you. But they smelt a rat after a time. Old Sally had spread it about that I was down in disguise; and some one of their agents must have reported this right away. I don't understand it all. Anyway, at last they got the idea of getting down a man who could recognize me. It was that damned Jew Liebfelt's clerk they got hold of. And I had a nasty scare when I almost ran into his arms at the station. There he was with Horne, and spotted me, too, worse luck. I made tracks, and they followed. I packed up at my diggings, and came up to interview the old Jacker when they got on my track. I was n't going to be served with writs if I could help it, and so I bolted for it. Phew, I did have a run for it. One of their bulldogs nearly got me on the lawn, but I tripped him into the shrubbery, and I gave 'em the slip, thank the Lord. I 've got to keep my end up," he concluded knowingly.

"That reminds me, Sir Gilbert," I interjected. "Are you a magician? Do you wave a wand and disappear?"

"Eh, what?" he stared. "Oh, you mean the stairs in the wall. Oh, I knew that when I was a boy. It leads down into a shrubbery along the western wing. What uncle used to call a sally-port. I 'll show you how, if you come up."

Well, in the circumstances, I rather wanted to know how I stood, and so we went, Norroy chatting in a friendly way and quite at his ease. When we arrived at the last bay of the library where the angle of the walls was formed, he pointed out a panel in the guise of book-shelves and books, fitting quite closely so as to escape the casual eye. This opened with a spring, and Norroy flung the light into the dark aperture.

"I nearly barked my shins coming up in the blackness," he said. "It twists and is awfully narrow, but it gets there. Try it."

I did not think I would try it that night; I was content to have solved the riddle, and back we went to the smoking-room.

"Nice little snuggery, is n't it?" he asked, looking round.

"And now," I said, ignoring this, "what 's the next move?"

He screwed up his face comically. "I 've got to get out," he said. "I 'll do 'em yet. I 've got my wind again, and I 'm fit for a cross-country steeplechase with any one. Don't you worry your head, old man."

I was not worrying my head, but I felt rather reluctant to turn my visitor loose among his persistent enemies. It was, of course, no business of mine, nor was it very moral of him to be eluding his creditors. Yet human nature is at bottom sportive, and loves to back the adventurous and the desperate. A forlorn

hope appeals to its compassion, and surely Sir Gilbert Norroy was heading his own forlorn hope. The enemy environed us.

"Can't you effect a compromise?" I suggested, "and straighten out your affairs?"

"They 're a bit top-heavy," he said, without feeling. "I 've been piling it up like a fool. There 's this place, for instance. My solicitors hold a mortgage on it for a lump. But they 're very decent about it — don't push me. And then there 's a devil of a lot been accumulating. At least," he looked at me ruefully, "perhaps you would n't think it a lot, but it runs to thousands, and when you can't raise two brass farthings to jingle on a tombstone, it might as well be millions. No; it 's no go. I might have managed with old Liebfelt and the livery people and the Bond Streeters, if they had n't parted with the debts. But this chap, who has taken it on, is going to have his pound of flesh."

"You mean to say," I asked, starting, "that some one has bought up your debts?"

"Yes, a chap called Horne, as far as I can make out, the little Johnny who was after me to-night — the Johnny who was staying in the inn." He laughed. "Why, he must be mad now to think of the number of times he met me face to face, and was worrying for his money."

I was thinking. The affair had an odd look.

"Were you known to be in difficulties?" I asked. "Or did they think you solvent?"

He grinned. "I should guess they knew all about me in London Town," he said. "I 've been going the pace, and these Johnnies know pretty well."

"Then why should Mr. Horne have the grand idea of buying up your debts?" I asked.

He blinked at me. "Dunno," he said. "May I have one more, old chap, a nightcap before I turn out, what?"

I made a gesture of assent, and considered as I eyed him.

"I 've been watching this pretty carefully," I said at last, "and I won't pretend to understand it. But you seem to have a lot of folk up against you."

"Horne's agents," he said indifferently.

"Well, there 's a good deal behind Horne, if my observation 's right," I replied. "There 's a swell called Naylor."

"Naylor!" He started.

"They seem as thick as thieves," I said.

"That 's rum," he said slowly. "That was the name of the chap that wanted to buy the Castle."

"What?" I got a little excited here. "Did any one ask for your estate?"

"I got a letter from a man named Naylor about it. In fact he 's pressed me about it — seemed to think it would suit his tastes. But I 'm not selling. I 'm going to cling on to the old bricks and mortar. Dash it, you must have some consideration for what 's been in the family so long."

"And Naylor," said I eagerly, "is hand in glove with this Horne and the duns. It looks like a game."

"Think so?" he said blinking, and stuck his glass in his eye. "What 's the game?"

"I should like to know," I answered, "and between us we may know it. Naylor wants the Castle, and

Horne, Naylor's friend, wants to force you into liquidation. That 's a good start for us."

"That 's what it tots up to," confessed Sir Gilbert, after pondering this. "If I got a judgment for the money against me I 'd have to file my own petition. I 'd have to look in at Carey Street."

"And the Castle would be sold," I said.

He hesitated. "Yes," he assented, "as far as the estate goes, that 's not entailed. Damn it," he added. "It 's rough luck."

He took it pretty easily, or seemed to do so. I lost sight and count of him for a few minutes, and then I heard his voice.

"Well, I 'll be clearing out." He had risen.

"You forget, they will be on the lookout for you," I said.

"Oh, I 'll manage," he replied cheerfully. "If you 'll let me have old Jacker I 'll make shift."

I went to the window and looked out on the moonlit lawn. No one was visible, but I knew now that the house was watched. The riddle was not solved yet. It only began with duns.

"Look here, Norroy," said I, suddenly, "you 're not going. You 're going to put up here."

"Not I," he said heartily. "You 've no concern with my business. It 's rather a shabby business, too."

"Anyway," I said firmly, "I 'm going to take a hand in it. You see in a way it 's been thrust on me, and I 've got interested. I don't know what to make of it, and I should like to know what to make of it. I 've never heard of such persistent creditors."

"They take the cake," he said, "but I 'm going to hang on to the old place."

"In that case," I argued, "you must hide here."

"Honest?" he asked. I nodded. "Good man. You 're a Chancellor, Brabazon." He breathed a sigh as of relief. "Well, old Jacker will be able to fix me up somewhere, I 've no doubt."

"Oh, we 'll arrange all that," I said. "I shall rather enjoy the fun, though I must confess that in the circumstances I think you were foolish to come down here."

I thought he looked at me furtively. "I had a bit of business on," said he, and after a moment asked: "Is n't there some one painting up-stairs?"

"Yes," I said. "A Mr. Toosey, who apparently designs to copy all the art treasures of the Castle."

"Yes, a good chap — clever chap, I hear," said Sir Gilbert, hurriedly. "Well, what do you say to getting hold of Jacker? A good old boy, Jacker!"

"Certainly," I replied. "If he 's in bed we 'll have him out."

"Bless your heart, I 'll lay he 's not a room off waiting," said Norroy, confidently. "This will have put him out."

It seemed he was right, to judge from the time Jackman took to answer the bell. His face expressed nothing, nor did he bear any visible sign of disturbance. He looked at us as if it were the most natural thing in the world that we should be sitting there together at midnight.

"Sir Gilbert Norroy will stay with me for the present, Jackman," I said slowly, "and I want you to prepare a room at once."

"Yes, sir," said Jackman.

"Beat 'em on the post, Jacker," remarked his master, genially.

"Yes, sir," said Jackman, without emotion.

When he was gone my mind flashed back over his association with me and the events of the last few weeks, and I remembered something.

"That note-book!" I cried. "Did you take that?"

"No, Jacker," said Norroy, dropping his eye-glass, and surveying me with deliberation. "Jacker did n't know what it might be, and thought it might give me away."

"Well, it did," said I, dryly. He stared, and I told him of my recognition of the handwriting.

"Oh," he said easily, "that don't matter."

"Well, it mattered more than a mere scrappy list of the pictures in your gallery did," I said.

"Oh, you saw that?" he asked, and looked at me, I thought, a little sheepishly. "Well, old chap," he went on, "you 're doing me an awful good turn, and I don't mind letting you into the secret. But don't give it away. It was an idea of mine."

This was the third or fourth time he had referred to an idea.

"What 's that?" I asked.

"Well, you see, it 's these pictures," said Sir Gilbert, and his face assumed a knowing aspect. "They 're by some thundering good fellows, and some of them have been in the family a long while. Of course I would n't get rid of the family portraits, don't you know. But the other stuff 's awful dull, and I thought I 'd get 'em copied."

"To duplicate the dullness," I said sarcastically.

Sir Gilbert's look of knowingness increased. "Not much," he said. "You see they 're heirlooms — got to go down to my descendants, don't you know, and all that sort of thing. Well, I have n't got any. So

they can't. And it occurred to me that they were no use if I had n't. See?" Sir Gilbert explained emphatically with his hands to assist him, as if anxious that I should see his point. "If I die those pictures go nowhere; well, I have n't got any descendants, so I 'm not cheating any one. Consequently, I don't see why I should n't sell 'em. What? My solicitors told me I could n't." He chuckled. "But I can. I got this Toosey man through a friend of mine, a chap who writes sporting novels, to come down and copy 'em. And then I 'll ship the originals off to America, and sell 'em, and stick the copies up, what?"

My face fell before this amazing scheme, and I had a violent inclination to go into a fit of laughter. Sir Gilbert sat there with an earnest countenance, his eyeglass levelled on me, painfully marshalling in his mind the arguments which had led him into a career of crime. He seemed anxious I should understand.

"You see, Brabazon, they can't go to my descendants because I have n't got any. So it 's all right. I can't cheat people who ain't born, can I?"

"Suppose you do have any?" I got out at last.

"Oh, Lord, no, not me," he said decisively, and seemed to think. "If I did have any I 'd buy 'em back, or make it up to them somehow. But not me." He thought awhile. "There was a sort of family notion that I was to marry my cousin, Miss Rivers," he went on. "She 's got pots of money, they say — father was a manufacturer up north somewhere. But I 've never seen her, and I don't buy a pig in a poke. I 'm not on sale." He was silent a moment longer, and then added, quite irrelevantly: "Smart girl, Miss Harvey, ain't she? I say, she 's a fair flyer, Brabazon, what?"

CHAPTER X

THE BUTCHER BOY

THE mystery, which had seemed about to solve itself, had now in my eyes taken a darker color. As I told Norroy, I had never heard of creditors who pressed a victim with such ruthlessness. Not but what they had some excuses, if one examined the matter calmly. This young man had "outrun the constable" in a most reckless way, and he must now pay the penalty. So far as I could gather from his eminently disconnected statements, the Castle was mortgaged pretty fully, and a sale would bring but a small sum in excess. There was that amount of reason at any rate in his refusal to go to the market, quite apart from sentiment. Sentiment I somehow found odd in Sir Gilbert Norroy. His creditor, who had bought up his debts, had another reason for wishing to push him to extremes, — he wanted the estate. And Norroy had a sentiment against this compulsory sale. I did not blame him, though I wondered at it in him. And I had undertaken to help him.

It was, after all, an easy matter in practice, whatever might be alleged against it in morals. My guest was not difficult, and in a way he seemed businesslike. He visited Toosey next morning to inspect his progress in the nefarious work of copying the pictures, and came back very much pleased.

"He 's making a rattling job of it," he declared. "You would n't know one from the other."

Toosey, it appeared, was not party to the criminal transaction, being hired to reproduce the replicas without knowledge of their ultimate destination.

"Does he know who you are?" I inquired.

"Damned if I know," said Norroy, suddenly. "I talked a bit about things — told him what I wanted."

"All right," I said, seeing the sort of man I had to deal with. "I 'll see him."

I went up. Mr. Toosey greeted me with constraint, for I don't think he fully trusted me.

"Mr. Toosey," said I, "that was Sir Gilbert Norroy who paid you a visit."

"I thought so," said Peter Toosey, screwing up an eye to examine his color.

"The fact is," said I, "he 's in trouble."

Mr. Toosey put down his palette. "Police?" he asked with interest.

"Well, not precisely."

Mr. Toosey seemed disappointed.

"Duns!" I said.

He laughed. "Oh, duns!" as if that mattered nothing in the least.

"The fact is," said I, again playing on the adventurous heart I had detected in him, "all these people are after him." I waved a hand vaguely at the window. Mr. Toosey's eyes sparkled. "And I 'm hiding him. I don't want you to mention he is here, seeing I 've taken you into my confidence."

"Naturally," said Mr. Toosey, "I should have said nothing as a gentleman. But, of course, if it 's duns I 'd do it on principle."

"Thank you," I said. "We must keep him quiet. He must lie low. We must guard him, Toosey."

He was gravely interested. "I 'll think out a plan," he said presently. "You may rely on me."

I marched out triumphant, and found Norroy turning over the leaves of an illustrated weekly, containing examples of female beauty, with every appearance of absorption.

"I 've silenced him," I said. "He 's constitutionally the foe of duns."

"Thanks, old chap," said Norroy. "I say, is n't this girl a bit like Miss Harvey, what? Rattling good figure!"

"That reminds me," I went on. "What are we to do about those ladies? Mrs. Harvey and her daughter are sure to call in a day or two. They 'll find you here. To them — well, you are still Mr. Eustace, you know."

"Gilbert Eustace is my name," said he, sticking in his eye-glass and staring at me. "Look here, I 'm not on to be known just now. Let us wait a bit. I 'm Eustace still."

"Very well," said I. "I 'll tell Jackman. And you 'd better make yourself as comfortable as you can while we reconnoitre."

I visited the village later in the morning, leaving Jackman to mount guard, but I saw nothing of the ladies. Nor had I time to call, as I should like to have done, for I was on a mission to secure some of Norroy's belongings from his lodgings. I bore a letter to his landlady, giving instructions that they should be sent to the station at Arncombe, which had occurred to us as a cunning device in the event of inquiries being made at the cottage. I felt I ought to inform Miss Forrest that

our suspicions in regard to Mr. Eustace were unfounded, and I resolved to do so at the earliest opportunity. We had lunch comfortably, during which I learned a good deal more about Norroy's affairs, and was vastly entertained by his philosophy, if I may so dignify it. He had an excellent belief in his knowledge of the world, a perfect confidence, and a straightforwardness in speech which was exemplary. He had, I judged, the simple mind and instincts of a superior animal, carried off by bluff good manners, and his good nature was imperturbable. He did not even display any animus against his persecutors.

"A rum business," was his verdict on their proceedings, and he seemed to want to go no deeper.

About four o'clock I heard a ring at the front bell, and presently Jackman entered to acquaint me that a gentleman desired to see me. He glanced at his master, and I saw that he would have said something if he had not been a perfect servant. I took the card.

"This is coming to close quarters," I remarked with a whistle. "Horne!"

Norroy looked up. "The little chap with the big head," he said. "I 'd better make myself scarce."

I thought so, too, and presently when Mr. Horne was ushered in I was alone. He gave me an awkward bow, and came forward still more awkwardly, sitting down on the extreme edge of a chair.

"How can I serve you, Mr. Horne?" I asked cheerfully.

"Well, I called about Sir Gilbert Norroy," he said in a soft voice, his bright eyes dancing on me. "I hold bills of his, and I 'm anxious to have them paid."

He looked very simple and gentle, but I could hardly

believe him so. Anyway, I was glad to have the ground cleared for action.

"And why come to me?" said I, as amiably as he.

"Because we have reason to believe that Sir Gilbert is here," he said plumply.

"Oh!" I replied. "Is that so? And what if he should be? What has it to do with me?"

"We thought you might be willing to meet us, Mr. Brabazon," he proceeded composedly. "You see we stand to lose a biggish sum in the matter, and it would be obliging us very much if you met us."

I smiled at the preposterous notion that I should stand in with the dunner in the matter of his quarry.

"There does n't seem very much reason in that idea," I observed. "Have you any reason for thinking I should help you to catch your man — that, I take it, is what you mean."

"Well, hardly," he said. "You see, if you would allow us to see Sir Gilbert, it would simplify matters, and would n't in any way hurt you. It would be a convenience to us. That 's all we ask."

"Why suppose he is here?" I asked, going on another tack.

"Oh, we know that," he asserted coolly.

I pondered. "I dare say you know your own business best, Mr. Horne," I said. "And if, as you say, Sir Gilbert Norroy is here, I can assure you he has never entered with my knowledge."

He seemed slightly ruffled, and shifted on his chair. "We happen to know he has often been here," he said.

They had, then, noticed Norroy's visits, but had not until now suspected him. I rose.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Horne."

He lingered. "The course I propose would not in any way embarrass or compromise you, sir," he said. "I merely wish to see Sir Gilbert."

"Oh, you are quite at liberty to see him," I said. "But why come to me?"

"If you will allow me to explain — " he began, but I interposed.

"I don't think so. I have wished you good afternoon."

Still he would not go. "I think I have made myself clear, Mr. — Mr. Horne?" I said meaningly.

"In this matter —" he began. I rang the bell, and it seemed to me that he turned and listened to it. "The matter involves a heavy loss for me," he went on, "and I think it might be settled with a little negotiation between the parties. I come in a friendly spirit — " Jackman had not come. I rang again angrily. "You see — "

"Mr. Horne, if I do not see you outside in two minutes I 'll take a gross liberty, but one nevertheless allowed by law. I am allowed to use just the proper force, you will remember."

Where the mischief was Jackman? At last I heard a door go, the feet of a man running in the hall. Mr. Horne picked up his hat and hastily retreated, as Jackman burst into the room in a flurry of disorder.

"Show that gentleman out," I called impatiently.

"Yes, sir." Jackman, much winded and discomposed of face, preceded my visitor to the door. Then he came back.

"Why on earth did n't you come before?" I asked. "I 've had to put up with that little toad for quite ten minutes."

"I — I 'm sorry, sir, but I had an alarm," panted Jackman.

"What was that?" I inquired.

"I — the butcher came to the door to say Miss Harvey had an accident with her car, sir."

"What?" I cried.

"Yes, sir — down by the shrubbery, sir; but I could n't find it."

I had been walking sharply to the door and stopped now. "Could n't find it!" I repeated. "Could n't find the car, Jackman?"

"No, sir."

"Where did the boy say?"

"I understood it was down by the shrubbery, sir, near where the tradesmen's road runs into the drive."

"We 'd better make inquiries at once," I said. "Where 's the boy?"

"I don't know, sir. I think he 's gone," said Jackman, weakly.

"Look here, Jackman, all this is very odd," I said. "It wants going into, and the sooner the better. Send Mrs. Jackman to me."

"She 's — I can't find her, sir."

There was a silence between us, and then I said: "Come, Jackman, let us have it."

The mask fell partially from the man; he began to talk almost like a human creature. "I believe there 's something bad in it, sir. I could n't find any sign of an accident, or of a car. It looked like a put-up job."

"To get you away," I said. "Well, but what about the butcher-boy?" I asked.

"I can't understand him, sir," said Jackman.

"Well, we 'd better find Mrs. Jackman," I said. "That 's our first duty."

As I passed into the hall I turned the key of the front door against emergencies, and then we sought the back parts of the Castle. The door from the kitchen into the courtyard was open, but there was no sign of Mrs. Jackman. We went out through the courtyard into the area of shrubs behind that abutted towards the kitchen gardens, but still no discovery rewarded our efforts. The kitchen gardens are entered through a big yew hedge, and on one side of this is a wild growth of trees, elders and hazels and the like, flourishing during these last years of the present ownership with luxuriant disorder. Here, too, is a small shed used once maybe as a depot for gardeners' tools, red-tiled, and green with creepers. As we passed near this I heard a cry. We listened greedily, and it was repeated in a wail of terror.

"Sally!" brought forth Jackman. "Beg your pardon, sir, Mrs. Jackman."

He turned to the shed, and examined the door, which was padlocked outside. But the key was in the lock, and in a minute or two we had the door open. Mrs. Jackman, with a scared and tear-stained face, met us with a gasp of relief. Her explanations were simple, so simple that I could almost have laughed. The butcher-boy had been busy with her earlier than with her husband, but her excitable feminine nature did not warrant such a plausible trick as had disengaged Jackman from his duty. She had been informed that Miss Harvey had had an accident, and was in the shed and that water was needed immediately. On the fleet wings of mercy the poor woman sped to find herself an easy captive.

"Jackman," said I, "that butcher-boy is a genius."

"I 'll get him dismissed at once, the wretch," sobbed Mrs. Jackman. "I can't imagine why Eastwoods got rid of the other one."

I pricked up my ears. "The other!" I said.

"Yes, he 's a new boy," said the lady, drying her eyes.

It only made me conceive a greater respect for our opponents.

"How do you know he was the butcher-boy?" I inquired with interest.

"From his blue apron, and having no hat, sir," said Mrs. Jackman, as if it were ridiculous to ask such a question.

"Well, he was n't," I said sharply. "And the sooner we get back the better. Jackman, does n't it strike you as remarkable that while I am engaged with one gentleman in the front, both Mrs. Jackman and you are inveigled away by another at the back? You see what the effect is — to leave the house bare of its defences."

"Good Lord, sir," said Jackman, startled.

We hurried back, and entered. I had not a doubt now as to the ruse and its purpose. Horne could not have hoped for one moment to enlist my sympathies on his behalf. His visit was timed as a trick, as part of an ingenious campaign. He held me in conversation in the front while his confederates enticed the Jackmans away. In the meantime I had no doubt that one of the gang had effected an entrance into the Castle. Our business now was to find him.

But there was a prior inquiry. Going back to what I have called in these pages my smoking-room I called Norroy by name. There was no answer. I passed into

the morning-room and repeated the call, still without success. Then I thought he had perhaps retired to his bedroom which was in the western wing near mine, and I tramped down the passage.

"What 's up? Has he gone?" said a voice, and Sir Gilbert appeared at a door.

"I want you to lock yourself in for a little. There 's mischief afoot," I said.

He came out into the passage. "Lock myself in, what?" he said.

"I believe there 's some one secreted in the house," I explained. "We 're going to have a look."

"All right, old chap. Let me get a paper or something."

"Go back," I urged. "I 'll get you it. Don't be a fool."

He went back obediently, and I slipped back into the smoking-room and grabbed a picture paper. As I came round into the passage I heard a conversation overhead, and almost at the same time the stamp of feet on the stairs at the foot of the passage. Then there burst into view running at breathless speed the butcher-boy, with Jackman panting behind him; simultaneously a scuffling fell on my ear, and I caught sight of Toosey sprawling in a heap at the foot of the stairs.

In another moment it seemed as though the butcher-boy would be in my arms, when (will it be credited?) the sound of a fiddle came from Norroy's room near by. I cursed him for an egregious ass, and cursed the chance that had made me fetch it for him from his rooms that morning. The running intruder pulled up and made a dive at the door, and to my horror it opened. It had not been locked according to my instructions. I flew

after him, and stretching a long arm seized his flying blue apron. This, with the impetus of his dash, tripped him up, and he came to the floor with a bump. I dragged him forth by the foot despite his struggles, and with the help of Jackman I got him up, and with one — two — three and away, we flung him like a sack between us through the open doorway into the court-yard, where he bit the accumulated dirt of the unswept area.

"Rattling good throw that, — beats rugger all to fits," said a voice in my ear, and turning I saw Norroy's equable face fitted with its eye-glass looking over my shoulder.

"Oh, don't be an ass, and do go back," I panted.

Jackman banged the door, and the sham butcher-boy, who had scrambled to his feet, was understood to be threatening us, by his gesticulating fist, with the law. His face was smutched with dirt and blood, and he looked a wretched object.

"Run him off, Jackman," I said.

The butler wanted no further inducement, as I fancy he had a score to pay off upon the butcher-boy. He opened the door again and gave chase. The server of writs took to his heels and disappeared around the corner of the Castle, with Jackman manfully toiling in his rear.

"Deuced narrow shave, old chap," said Sir Gilbert, still at my elbow.

CHAPTER XI

IN MY LADY'S CHAMBER

BY this time I felt something like a criminal escaping from justice, a coiner evading the officers, or a smuggler dodging the preventive men. It seemed to me that the thunders of the law must inevitably be trained on Norroy Castle. But I did not care; indeed I rejoiced in the prospect. And if Norroy did not rejoice, he certainly was indifferent.

We had repulsed the first attack, but I was fearful as to the campaign they would open out. They might get an order for permission to substitute service. In my plentiful ignorance of the law I knew that such a thing was possible, as I had often seen advertisements to such effect in the papers. And so we discussed affairs with that possibility in view. Yet throughout the next day the cordon of spies was not broken, and it was clear that Mr. Horne and his friends had not relaxed their vigilance. I recognized my cockney friend at the gates, and nodded to him in an affable manner.

"A long job?" I queried.

"What do you think?" he countered with a grin, and stuck a twopenny cigar between his teeth. "Tidy little place," he commented. "Niceish bit of sea, too, though it wants a promenade badly. If I 'ad that," he indicated the estuary with his dirty thumb, "I 'd run a pier like Southend across it. Get no end of people down then."

I shuddered as I laughed. "A ripping idea!" I said, lighted his cigar for him, and then applied the match to my own cigarette. He puffed away contentedly, and beamed on me amiably. We met on neutral ground, and exchanged civilities like gallant foes at odds for a principle but with no personal animus.

"Then there 's them caves," he went on. "Why, they 'd make the fortune of any seaside place. I 'd 'ave 'em in a Syndicate if I had my way. I wonder the Governor here does n't do it."

He threw his thumb over his shoulder towards the Castle.

"Tidy way they go in," he said, puffing again. "I did a crawl in myself yesterday afternoon, but the tide 's a bit dangerous, and I should n't care to be caught there, not much."

"Now where should I find Mr. Naylor, if I wanted him?" I asked as I left him.

He stared. "Naylor," he said with his cockney twang. "Who 's he?"

"I thought he was a friend of yours," I replied.

He shook his head. "I 'm from London. I don't know any about here."

"And the butcher?" I ventured.

A broad grin spread over his face. "I told 'em it was a rotten notion," he said. "Why, when he 's been at it as long as I have, he 'll have a bit more sense. You 've got to sap, and not to bombard. Sap 's the game. See?"

"I believe you 're right," I said, pausing to reflect. "It sounds right, and a most sensible policy."

He looked pleased at my approval. "If ever you want anything in the line done, sir," said he, with

modesty, "I 'm always good for a try." He drew out a soiled card with some difficulty from his pocket, which read:

JOHN BRACKETT
Bailiff's Assistant

21 Dickens Street, Clerkenwell

"Thank you," I said politely. "One never knows; and so urbane a broker's man is a treasure."

I bade him farewell, and left him doing sentry-go at my gates while I went down to the village. Mr. Horne's organization seemed to be complete, but I had learned that ostensibly he had no connection with Mr. Naylor. Why? If this whole matter of the debts was straightforward, why was all this secrecy displayed? It puzzled me.

I had been obliged to postpone the task of explaining Mr. Eustace to the ladies at Southington, but I felt I ought to delay no longer. I had not been seen since my unceremonious bolt after Norroy, and I descended now with the object of proffering my excuses. I was lucky enough to find them at home, and I was admitted by Miss Fuller, who seemed pleased to see me. I offered my apologies for my hasty exit, and received forgiveness as if it was a matter of no consequence. Norroy was anxious that his identity should not be known, and so I felt myself somewhat embarrassed in my mission. I had to show that I no longer felt any doubts of Eustace, and yet to avoid identifying him with Sir Gilbert. I walked round the subject warily, and a little awkwardly, as I was aware. And finally I blurted out my chief fact.

"You were right about Mr. Eustace, Miss Forrest. He is quite a respectable member of society."

"I was not aware that I said so," said Perdita, coolly.

"Oh, well," I grew confused, "I thought you believed in his innocence."

"Refusing to believe that he is mixed up in a crime is quite another matter from vouching for a person's respectability," she remarked decidedly.

"I accept the snub," I said, "and I put my neck on the ground. You do not necessarily pass him. I can well believe you have a high standard, Miss Forrest."

She cast a curious glance at me. "It is a standard, at any rate," she asserted, "and not nothing."

"Women," said I, nursing my knee, and fixing a sententious but appealing eye on Miss Fuller, "women are given to high ideals. They are fond of climbing about on giddy precipices where man, frail man, is afraid to follow them."

"That is sarcastic," observed Perdita, primly.

"Oh, no, dear," broke in kind Miss Fuller, "I think what Mr. Brabazon means — "

"Oh, don't let 's have annotated editions," said naughty Perdita, impatiently.

"Let me annotate my own sermon," I besought. "I spoke in all humility. I see pinnacles in the empyrean, and I admire, but I dare not attempt to reach them. Women do. Perhaps men are wiser in giving up, and feeding practically in the valleys. After all, the main business of life is feeding — mainly on others — so the herbage of the lower slopes for me! But I have heard that on the top the grass is sweeter, and the view finer.

I should like the grass if I could get there. I 'm not bothered much about views."

Perdita examined me with earnest and innocent eyes, but what she decided I don't know. She changed the conversation by a remark to Miss Fuller. I suspected that I ought to be going, but I did n't want to go. I had n't really done justice to Eustace. I awaited my chance and deftly drew the conversation back — not to him specifically, but to men in general.

"We are a poor lot," I declared, lumping all of us together, "and under our visible obsessions we descend to the bottomless pit. Wisdom is fled to brutish beasts, and divine justice inhabits only the hearts of women, where it is locked up."

"What do you mean by that, Mr. Brabazon?" asked Perdita.

It did sound ambiguous, but I explained as well as I could, enlarging on the justice and generosity of her sex. She listened quietly, and then a sweet little smile spread infectiously over her face, signalling dimples.

"Oh, what a humbug you are!" she said.

"Oh, but, Perdita, Mr. Brabazon means — " The dear lady got no farther.

"Mr. Brabazon can say what he means himself, Isabel," said she, imperiously, "if he wishes us to understand what he means or if he means anything," she added; and then her eyes met mine.

I designed to throw chagrin and reproach into my glance, but I do not know if I did. She suddenly burst out laughing and I followed suit. Miss Fuller, after staring at both of us, weakly joined in, and immediately afterwards rose and left the room.

"Mr. Brabazon, you are bowled out. You stand revealed in all your naked insincerity," said Perdita.

"Please don't judge me so hardly," I said, and indeed I did not want her to regard me as a flippant person. I thought of Eustace in a happy flash, and of putting him right in her eyes. "I am serious enough about life. I think it sometimes beautiful. But it has its tiresome moments, and then one must pretend."

"And mock?" she asked, with laughing eyes.

"Ye–es!" I said doubtfully. "Sometimes. Yet it is but the crossing of a passage to tragedy, even if the tragedy have its sordid aspects. A man," said I slowly, "is usually a fool in his youth, if a philosopher at forty. And a good many of us have not reached that age yet. It is necessary sometimes to hear the whole before condemning the part."

Perdita's laughing eyes grew serious and sympathetic, and I resolved to continue. After all, I was doing a kind thing in mitigating her evident contempt for Eustace.

"Take the case of a man like this," I pleaded. "He has been brought up in a more or less large way. Suppose, for example, his father ingrained him from his birth with sporting notions, the turf, the hunt, the shooting field, or the gun-club. But he had better instincts at bottom, probably."

"Yes," said Perdita, with manifest interest.

"Consider him much of a fool, if you like, but a decent fool who has had no nursing, a man of downright ineffectual good nature, and the taste for popularity. He gives away with both hands, and he cannot tell his friends from his foes. He is born, in fact,

to be preyed upon, unless he is rescued. And that rescue may come too late."

"How is it to come?" asked Perdita, leaning forward, her elbow on her knee, her chin on her palm, her gaze rapt with interest in my little problem. The beauty of that long line sweeping from the waist outwards, thus manifest, took my eye and arrested me. I stumbled, picked myself up and resumed with difficulty.

"It might come through anything," I said. "An accident achieves a revolution. Provided the material is plastic, Providence employs odd artificers. But some are obvious — a woman, ambition, shock, even an independent graduation in life. But let us say in this case — " I thought — "partly the rough usage of adversity, and partly the dawn of sentiment. Let us leave it at that. Anyway, you see my point. We cannot judge the man unless we see his life whole."

"No–o," she assented; adding, "but a man can make what he likes of his life, if he be a man."

O, hard young heart! And, O, sweet innocence! What is determinism to you? Life is bounded only by birth and death to you, and betwixt is a straight and even pathway in which there can be no doubts. Within handsome hedges flung with bryony and honeysuckle, and in winter with the wild thorns of the bramble, walks our maiden on a course she can mistake not, to an end of which she is certain. For Perdita, I felt the hedge would break some day, so much shone out of her imaginative eyes. And when it did, pray God, I should be walking by her side and sharing in her cares and sorrows! The flush of her earnest face went to my heart with a stab of bitter delight. I could not put

forth a hand to pluck her. Her innocence, her friendliness, her pretty distance defied me. What was she saying?

"He ought to be able to pull himself together, and to start afresh. It is never too late, and there are always friends to help."

O, wise young judge! Portia looked out of Perdita's eyes. "There are friends," I agreed, "but how many? And may not a man outwear his friends' patience? I am speaking of a silly man, of a man you might wrinkle your nose at." Had she not already wrinkled her pretty nose at poor Eustace?

"I hope I should not be so uncharitable," she hastened to say. "Certainly not, if I knew all the facts."

"This man we will conceive in great financial straits," I said, "to have plunged recklessly and lost, and to be beset by creditors and reduced to a pitiful case. He is obliged ingloriously to avoid his fellow men, to run in shame around corners, and to dodge pieces of blue paper."

I was conscious now that I was painting Norroy in somewhat theatrical colors, as it were a poster for the hoardings. But I had my reward. Perdita looked pensive and saddened at the picture. Her tender heart was touched. Besides, she had just professed charity.

"Still, I should say to such a man 'Hope and be strong,'" she said in a voice charged with feeling.

"You are kind," I said, "and I believe you would find excuses. But others — "

I happened at that moment to glance out of the window, and to my wonder saw the butcher-boy walking boldly up the stone pathway in the company of his master, Horne. I jumped to my feet and stared in

astonishment. What on earth could bring them here? My silence and my abrupt action brought Perdita to her feet.

"What is it?" she asked with alarm in her gaze.

I laughed. I had gone so far, and as Norroy was to be my temporary guest, I should have to explain him somehow. "The blue paper," I said, "of which I have just spoken, advertises itself opportunely."

She looked startled. "You mean — " she halted, gazed out at the men who had reached the door — "writs?" she asked in a low voice. I nodded.

She flew out into the passage in a state of excitement which seemed to me disproportionate, and at the same time I heard the door open and Mrs. Lane's voice raised to answer a question from the visitors. A flying vision of white flashed in at the door of the sitting-room again, tragically pale of face.

"Please — oh, it 's too late. You must be quick," she breathed.

"What — " I began, but was pushed with a certain force and vehemence towards a door in the inner wall. As I am an honest man, and one in love, I will swear and vow that I did not understand; that the manœuvre was so sudden and unexpected that I could not disengage my thoughts, and that when she had opened the door and thrust me through before her, I was scarcely aware into what sort of room we had penetrated. I would have protested vaguely, not because I had any distaste to be so handled by her, but merely on the grounds of her own inconvenience and obvious distress. But I was allowed no time. My Perdita, of the vivid imagination, had broken bounds forthright, and she was as impetuous as a wild roe.

"In here, in here, oh, please!" she cried

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"In here — in here, oh, please!" she cried, and opening something which I blankly recognized in my bewilderment as a wardrobe she pushed me in. Next moment I was in darkness; the door had closed upon me.

I had time now to reflect upon what had so marvellously happened, and on my present position. You know to which sense are the most direct avenues. Perhaps it is exactly because we inherit so primitive a cognition that it makes so sharp and so mysterious an appeal. The fragrance of lavender mingled in my nostrils with the unnamed and individual fragrance of a woman's dresses. Do you remember how Clara Vaughan was known to her lover by the incense of her hair? I breathed Perdita in my sweet, close prison, and I thrilled with absolute happiness.

But then returned reason on the tide of returning thought. My brain could not but piece together the facts leading up to my incarceration at such dear hands. I knew it in a flash. Perdita, dear heart, had read me into the parable I had set forth, and had rescued me from the duns!

Was there ever such sweet charity? Friends, quoth she! Lord, did friend ever show herself in so self-sacrificing and generous a light? For me she had foregone the integrity of her chamber, and for me had she violated the sanctities of her boudoir. I strove to open the wardrobe, but it was not possible from within, and then in the very air of Perdita I pondered happily until brought up by a horrid thought. Did she, then, regard me as the incapable and reckless fool I had painted Norroy. I had put on the colors with a trowel, and now my jaw fell to think that she had recognized me in that

portrait. And yet she had condescended to befriend such a creature.

The door opened and I stepped forth.. Perdita, flushed with triumph, stood before me.

"They — they 've gone away," she said eagerly. "They thought you were here, but I made Mrs. Lane show them over the dining-room and the sitting-room. And they seemed satisfied."

I caught at her hands — and both were in mine a moment. Should I — dare I — tell her, and ruin her splendid happiness? But I thought of my ugly portrait, as painted by me, and I hardened my heart.

"Nothing sweeter could have been done in the world," I said ardently. "Nothing more wonderful."

Her color was fast in her face, and for a moment she did not attempt to withdraw her hands.

"And you — you would have shown so much charity and loving-kindness to a man of no worth, who has ignominiously to dodge his creditors!" I said.

She did not seem able to find a reply, but she got one of her hands loose.

"You said we must not judge until we knew the whole," she said at last.

"I shall never forget that you did it for me, thinking it was I," I said, and in my feeling I could have drawn her to me.

She drew back. "You!" she cried. "Then it was n't you!"

I shook my head. "I have no history. I am not even interesting through defects. I spoke of Mr. Eustace."

Her color fled, leaving her white and startled, and her hand grew a little cold in mine.

"I have found out a good deal about him," I went on hurriedly. "He is really a good fellow, but has botched his affairs. He is staying with me at the Castle. I wanted you to know."

She withdrew her hand now, almost mechanically.

"I see!" she said weakly.

"But you did it for me, and I will never forget it," I cried eagerly.

"It seems to me the sooner you forget such a foolish mistake the better," said Perdita, coldly.

I had offended her as I should have guessed that I might. Not the sweet angel from heaven likes to see its magnanimous actions turn into comedy. Perdita moved to the door, and I followed. My last glance took in the demure little white bed and the dimity curtains and the hanging wardrobe. Then I was in the sitting-room, once more the formal visitor, and as if the intimate hospitality of that virginal chamber had never been extended to me. I had upset her and I was best away. And now I would have given worlds to have kept silence. I left miserably, and I never remembered to wonder what Mr. Horne and the butcher-boy had wanted of me.

CHAPTER XII

THE LEAGUER

I WAS surprised when I reached the Castle, after an amiable exchange with my cockney friend, to hear the sound of a fiddle streaming from the open windows. It ceased as I got to the door, and voices rose in conversation. I entered, and, behold, Mrs. and Miss Harvey! The former greeted me with effusion, but the latter merely nodded pleasantly from her seat where Norroy was instructing her how to put her fingers on the fiddle strings. She made a picture of graceful awkwardness with her large cart-wheel hat and her full draperies. Mrs. Harvey explained that they had come to pay their dinner-call, but she got no assistance from her daughter, who was wrangling prettily with Norroy as to the exact angle of her elbow.

"If I put it there it sticks out too much," she declared, as one resolute on harmonies of figure as well as of sound.

"Just chuck your shoulder up a bit," suggested Sir Gilbert, taking command. "Don't mind your angles; they 'll come into the picture somehow."

"Oh, Mr. Eustace!" said Christobel in despair.

The name brought me to. This was Mr. Eustace still, and I had been upon the point of calling him Norroy. The anxious eyes of the elder lady were fixed

on me. This was Eustace, homeless, impecunious, and beleagured, and he played the fiddle, and taught a pretty girl to strum! The mother's eyes implored me, as I construed them. *I* was Sir Gilbert, and this was an interloper, a wastrel, a foundling, a waif on the harsh seas of fortune. Sir Gilbert adjusted his eye-glass and deigned to recognize my presence.

"Hulloa, old chap! Where did you get to? Look here, I've given Mrs. Harvey and Miss Harvey tea."

"I owe you many thanks," I replied, "and much envy."

An interrogation from his pupil drew off his attention from me, and Mrs. Harvey seized the opportunity to enter into talk. I could see she wanted to know about Norroy, and I was able to gratify her in all but his name, which she took for granted. No, he had no profession as far as I knew. I did n't think it followed that he was necessarily a wealthy man. Undoubtedly he was of good family. And he was a most amusing companion. Mrs. Harvey compressed her lips as she regarded her wilful daughter anxiously.

"I don't suppose he 'd make a big hole in things in New York," she ventured.

I agreed, adding that if my friend ever went to New York he would expect some one to make a hole for him.

"Our men don't do that," said she, with some acerbity of criticism in her tone. To her Norroy was a hopeless ineligible. I was destined to receive two bombardments that afternoon, for Miss Christobel assailed me a little later, and upon the same topic.

"This is a pretty mystery, Mr. Brabazon," she said. "When I last saw you you were talking in the most gloomy and most tragic manner about Mr. Eustace.

And now he's your guest. What's come to the universe?"

"I discovered my error, and am repenting in ashes," I said lightly.

She turned on me her hazel eyes. "Does he know, then?" she asked.

"When I told him I had suspected him of burglary, he laughed, dropped his eye-glass and said, 'how ripping!'"

"He would," she said laughing. "It's just what he would do," she cried approbatively, "and I was right in my instinct after all."

"A woman's instinct," said I, with an air of profundity, "is like a woman's tongue and a woman's face — it never lies."

Miss Harvey considered this inanity. "Mine will — I mean my face — I suppose, when I get about fifty," she said.

"You will never be fifty," I declared.

"I don't know that I want to die young, exactly," said this frank, unself-conscious girl.

"You will never die," I said. "Your age will be immortality."

"That's nice of you," said she. "But tell me honestly what I shall be like at fifty. I believe you have second sight, Mr. Brabazon. There's something uncanny about you."

I bowed to the compliment.

"You'll sit gracing the bottom of a great table in an ancestral hall," I rambled on, "and your children's children shall call you blessed, and —"

"Why, Mr. Brabazon, I shall only be fifty, not a hundred," she protested.

"But if you marry at twenty," I suggested.

"I 'm more than that already," she said pensively. "I 'm twenty-five."

"Oh, we must marry you off at once. That's terribly old," I said hastily. "'She was no longer in her first youth' as the old novels used to run. 'She had passed her nineteenth year.'"

She laughed. "I'm not in a hurry, anyway, and I don't know that I fancy ancestral halls so much," she said, with an unconscious glance round the room.

When they had gone, Sir Gilbert stood looking out of the window in a brown study. But all that his meditations brought was the colloquial remark, "That 's a ripping girl!"

I pulled him away from the window. "You're exposing yourself to the fire of the enemy," I said, "and after the episode of the butcher-boy we can't afford to take risks. Please remember you are fighting excellent strategists. And let me tell you this, Norroy; you've pulled through so far by luck more than by management. You must regard yourself in the light of a besieged town. You may possibly venture out for air and exercise by night; but in the daytime you're a close prisoner. I wonder at your daring to give tea to the ladies."

"Oh, hang it, one can't shut off everything," protested the prisoner.

"I have been thinking," I went on. "Seeing the lengths these people are prepared to go to, we can't be too particular. Your present room is by no means safe. We must find a more secluded place. Do you know of any?"

He frowned over his reflections. "What about the jewel-room?" he said at last.

"What, the strong-room up-stairs?"

He nodded. "By Jove, that's a thundering good idea. Jacker can put a bed in. Let 's have a look."

He jumped off the table on which he was sitting and went up-stairs, with me at his heels. Descending the length of the gallery, with a familiar nod to Mr. Toosey, who was still laboring at his criminal task, Norroy paused in front of the oak door and inserted a Yale key in the lock. It opened, and discovered a small room, fairly well lighted by a slit in the masonry, and surrounded by empty cabinets and shelves. One or two iron safes were set in one corner.

"Why, it 's empty," I exclaimed in surprise.

"Hocked!" said Sir Gilbert, sententiously. "Most of it. Of course I have to keep the jewels that are heirlooms. Uncle Ned was an old fathead; he left them by will to my wife, confound him."

"That was pretty of him," I said.

"But I have n't got a wife," grumbled Sir Gilbert, aggrievedly. "There they are," he said in a melancholy voice, indicating with the point of his toe one of the safes in the corner. "Can't do anything with them."

"Don't you think Toosey might copy them," I suggested with mild irony.

He screwed his glass round on me, and guffawed when he realized my intention. "You are a joker," he said. "But this will do, won't it, Brabazon?"

I thought it would do very well. It was quite private, was barred by a fighting Yale lock, and was also easily accessible from the living-rooms. We agreed that Jackman should fit it up at once as a prison cell.

Norroy resigned himself with his imperturbable good nature to this incarceration. He had the faculty of making the best of things when once he was convinced of the necessity. He was, I gathered, difficult to drive, being an obstinate and insensate fellow, but he was comparatively easy to persuade, while you could cajole him without any trouble, unless it was a matter of principle for which he was contending. Principle, you cry! Yes, Sir Gilbert, twelfth baronet, was genuinely inspired by principles, though I will admit you would hardly have recognized them as such. They were, however, all his own, even if you should find them poor things. If he wanted his own way he was as obstinate as a pot-donkey, but you might persuade him that your way was his, and he would follow as docilely as the same animal. I fancy Sir Gilbert's brains were easily confounded, that his wits were without difficulty scattered. He bore no grudges, and he wasted no time in repining. Of a cheerful and optimistic character, he looked forward to a future which must at any rate be different from the present. And as the present was bad, why it did not take Sir Gilbert long to see that the future must be better. His logic was of such wholesome simplicity. All he stipulated for was his liberty at night, and that I thought we might contrive, particularly as we had a new ally presently, as you shall now hear.

It appears that Miss Harvey dropped in on her friends in the village and picked up a good deal of news. I had given Perdita my information under no pledge of secrecy, and indeed she would not suppose that what I had told her I designed to keep from her friend. But it may have been Miss Fuller who let out the news. It

does not signify. The only thing that mattered was that Miss Harvey arrived by herself at the Castle in a great state of excitement, and bursting with sympathy. She made no difficulty about broaching the subject, which she did in Norroy's presence quite naturally; and he accepted her query as naturally. I think that these two people had something akin in the unashamed honesty which characterized them.

"Yes, it's an awful bore, is n't it?" said Sir Gilbert, modestly. "But Brabazon's no end good about it. He's guarding me like a tiger."

She turned her fine eyes on me. "How nice of him! But tell me; do these horrid people hold many of your bills?"

"More than is comfortable," he said. "They want to sell me up. That 's what they're after. Of course I played the fool, but then we all did it. It 's heredity," declared Sir Gilbert, with the air of settling the difficulty once and for all.

"Well, if it is n't romantic!" said Miss Harvey. "Then are you shut up here to keep them out?"

He nodded. "Beastly nuisance, is n't it?"

Miss Harvey mused. "It is n't good for the health," she said.

"I'm going to climb out at nights," explained Norroy.

"You must n't let them get you," she adjured eagerly.

"Not me!" said Norroy, valiantly.

Miss Harvey rose to go, and offered a parting nod of encouragement to the baronet.

"Don't you mind too much," she advised. Sir Gilbert admired her through his eye-glass. "Old Jake Simmons, a friend of papa's, went bankrupt three times,

and he came out on top in the end. Ever been bankrupt before?"

Sir Gilbert shook his head. "I don't cotton to the notion, somehow," he said. "The fellows ask you all sorts of rude questions, what? They want to know if you had champagne for lunch, and to whom you gave presents, and that sort of thing."

"Old Jake used to say it was the foundation of his fortunes," said Miss Harvey, by way of stimulus. "He owns a big dry-goods store in Chicago."

"I've sometimes thought of starting a shop myself," said Sir Gilbert, adding pensively; "But I'm more fitted for a book-maker, I suppose."

Miss Harvey said good-bye cheerfully. "I'll come round and see how you 're getting on in the fortress," she promised. "I 've got to come over in a few days to see Miss Forrest."

The rustle of her petticoats was still in my ear when Norroy remarked sadly: "That's a ripping girl, what?"

I agreed, wondering at his doleful visage, and he resumed a moment later. "I wish I was not running under a false name, old chap."

"You can easily alter that," I told him. "You can retire behind the curtain, emerge with a bow and to a full orchestral salutation — Sir Gilbert Norroy."

"You see," he said, as if it explained matters, "my name 's Gilbert Eustace Norroy; so it was all right."

"Not a doubt of it," I agreed. "Moreover the substitution was for so excellent a purpose."

"Yes, of course, there's that," he said. "But, hang it, I don't like masquerading. I don't do it for fun."

"This is dead earnest," I assured him, "and we run risks for it."

He cheered up. "Miss Harvey says she 's coming in a day or two. I wish I could make a bit of money." He got up briskly. "I 'll go and see how old Toosey 's getting on," he said hopefully.

No event broke the monotony of the following day, at least until the evening. In the evening I felt that we might almost call a truce. We were aware of the leaguers about us, but it did not trouble us greatly. We had spirit enough to test it. Norroy sagely affirmed that writs could not be served after dark, and I argued that it did not much matter if they could. There was no danger in the night from our entrenched foes. In fact I had the mind to turn the tables on them by a sally.

We issued bravely forth from the Castle walls near nine o'clock. The air was flowing softly, and the dark and broken sky-line of the trees stood out against the lighter clouds in the west. We paced the lawn for a time, enjoying our cigars and the beautiful evening, and, in a way, each other 's company. It was odd how attracted I was by this amiable and witless young man. Differentiated from me by gulfs, as I conceived it, in intellect and taste and ethics, he yet claimed affinity by a subtle appeal to some accepted standard. His exterior manners were without finesse, but we met upon the same platform of behavior, and there was much more than behavior that drew me to him — a sort of good-humored individuality which might be typical of a fine animal. The darkness slowly invested the lawn and the borders, leaving the paths in a higher light. The limes muttered in the air, like those fabled "gossips of the prime." Norroy broke silence.

"Let 's go down to the lower garden and the copse," he suggested.

Accordingly we made our way thither, and without interference. Once in the shelter of the copse we felt safe, and, reaching the sea-wall, leaned over it and watched the darkling sea heaving itself on the rocks.

"I don't know but I could live here, Brabazon," remarked the owner at last. "It's not lively, but it's got its points. Full of little nooks," he added sentimentally.

I wondered what must be the issue from the clash of sentiment with primitive instincts in that generous chamber of his heart. But he had room for both and was unconscious of any incongruity. In a comfortable reverie he dreamed till at last he shook himself out of wonderland into the practical world again. I was watching the foreshore merging into the night, and was conscious, too, of a deeper shadow that moved. Yet it might be nothing. I strolled on westward towards the ascent in the grounds where the cliffs rose sheer from the high tides of the sea. I had not visited this part of the gardens before. We got to the top, and, crossing the wall, advanced to the edge of the cliff and looked down. The tide was high, and still rolling in some fifty feet below us. The water drew inshore with a low harsh mutter of sound, till it reached the narrowing buttresses of the rocks immediately below; then its voice grew hollower; a hundred echoes from the faces of the cliff overtook it and reinforced it; it swelled to a loud sonorous volume, and then burst with drums of thunder in the invisible caverns beneath, dying into rumbles and ghosts of sound and infinite whisperings in those secret depths within.

I returned from the contemplation of this incessant warfare, and laid my hand on Sir Gilbert's arm. The

man had no single defective drop of blood in his healthy animal body. His feet were on the very verge of the precipice, and he dreamed as he looked down. The retreating waves left me space for a voice which was not a shout.

"Look to the left," I said.

He turned his head. "Is he — what?"

"I noticed him down on the beach just now," I replied.

"Damn! let 's heave him over," he suggested.

"Norroy, I may wink at throwing a dun out of my own house — or yours," I said with mock indignation, "but I know where to draw the line. It 's about time we went back."

He obeyed me, and we climbed the wall, the black figure offering no molestation.

"Let's try t'other side," said Norroy. "This is a lark."

We crossed the Castle grounds and essayed the wall on the north side some hundreds of yards from the gates. Norroy burst out laughing. "Blessed if they ain't spry," he said. "Here 's another beggar already."

I discerned a figure running in the darkness. Norroy drew back. "All right, I'm not taking any," he said. "Look here, Brabazon," he said more earnestly when he had got down, and he took my arm, "what the devil do they want? Did you ever hear of a case like this?"

I was bound to confess that I had not, and I had no suggestion to offer by way of solution.

"Damned rum!" he muttered, as we strolled back. " Can't get the hang of it."

If we had only been furnished with an answer to the riddle we should have been more patient. As it was,

the situation uninterpreted began to get on my nerves, and on Mr. Toosey's. He, however, seemed to rejoice in its mystery, while he thrilled at its possibilities. He had already insisted on regarding himself as one of the besieged, and was at the most elaborate precautions to avoid notice in his own coming and going. He skulked in the shrubberies, scared Mrs. Jackman out of her wits by leaping out of one at an alarm, and had many preposterous plans to proffer for victualling the fortress. I explained that there was no fear of our lacking supplies, but he was resolved that we might some day come to a grip with starvation, and matured his schemes with that end in view. Above all, he kept a wary eye open for duns and strangers. This led to a rather unfortunate episode.

The rule in favor of admitting visitors to see the pictures had not been abrogated, merely because it had occurred to none of us to think of it. As a matter of fact, no visitor had presented himself at the Castle since Norroy had taken up his quarters there. And, no doubt, in my absence, Jackman found himself in a difficulty, when a tourist *did* present his card. He was an immaculate gentleman with an immaculate address, very stout, and with a politeness that was almost excessive, and he waved a huge Panama hat to cool his fevered brow after the exertion of getting up-stairs. Jackman, I conclude, had thought him over and admitted him, pending orders; but, like a good and patient servant, he hung about in the proximity of the visitor with a watchful eye. The stout gentleman inspected the pictures slowly, and with gravity, and made notes in a book. This was, apparently, what arrested the indignant attention of Mr. Peter Toosey,

who rose in his wrath and followed the visitor. With this satellite in his train the stout man toured the gallery with growing discomfort and growing suspicions. These culminated when Mr. Toosey's own suspicions reached their height at seeing the long pause made by the stranger before the door into the strong-room. Behind that barrier slumbered or rested the innocent master of the Castle. Mr. Toosey's doubts swelled to a head. He advanced with limber step, brush in hand.

"If I were you, I should go," he breathed with polite malevolence in the stout visitor's ear. The stout visitor (as I had the story from Jackman) cast a glance of trepidation at his interlocutor, and his ferocious garb of daubs.

"If I were you I should go — hook it — clear out!" repeated Mr. Toosey, with a crescendo of advice. The stout man endeavored for awhile to ignore this, tried to rivet his attention on the portrait by Van Dyck on the door, and to pretend that there was no one else in the room, and managed to drop his spectacles in his increasing agitation. As he stooped painfully to pick them up, a low but savage voice breathed over his scanty hair in accents of extreme and forbidding menace.

"If I were you I should hook it, vamoose, levant, skip," it hissed ferociously. These alternatives, I conceive, were selected by Mr. Toosey with care, in order that one at least of them might carry significance and conviction to the mind of this obdurate party.

The manœuvre was wholly successful. With a cry of alarm the corpulent stranger recovered himself, trod his glasses to flinders in the act, and backed in open distress towards the door. His withdrawal was has-

tened by threatened approaches of the supposed lunatic with the paint brush; and when I arrived on the scene he was well out into the drive waddling away for dear life. I pieced together the fragments of this tragedy from the communications of Jackman and the hero himself. It was then that the former got his orders, that henceforth no visitors should be admitted.

Well, at least, by this ordinance, we barred out the innocent visitors.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WINDOW SEAT

BUT we did not succeed in keeping out the enemy. It is a melancholy confession, and this chapter is the history of a failure. It began on the night of June the tenth.

In the afternoon Miss Harvey came over in her car, according to her promise, bringing with her Miss Fuller. The frank statement of the American girl informed me simply that Perdita would not come. I heard no reason, but I wondered wofully if she had forgiven me yet for my stupidity. Now I have always been disposed to think that I know a good deal of women, and have often volunteered with some success to interpret them to denser males of my acquaintance. I am quicker than most men at construing their emotions, and the plexus of feelings which constitutes their personality. But I will admit that Miss Fuller's attitude puzzled me. She had withdrawn herself from her friend to come; so the inference was that she desired to come. Yet she was visibly uncomfortable at the Castle, looked at Miss Harvey as if appealing to her to go, and had "yes" and "no" for conversation more than any healthy handsome young woman should have. I think it must have been her unusual attitude that set me "chaffing" her. I played the fool as elegantly as I could think, dandling carrots, so to speak, in front of

her frightened nose. It was only when I sounded the praises of Perdita that she relaxed. Her devotion was so great that I think all other sentiments were discharged by it. She spoke enthusiastically of her friend's attainments, and in particular of her painting.

"You came on a sketching tour?" I inquired.

"Oh — yes — of course," she darted forth a little awkwardly, and eyed me furtively as if I were a dangerous animal. I had never given her any cause to look on me thus, from the first hour when I had met her without stockings. My behavior had always been correct and modest. I liked Miss Fuller, and I did not want her to have erroneous opinions of me. In some way she had changed towards me, and I attributed the change to the incident of Perdita and the butcher-boy. Yet I could not see why she should have taken this unexpected turn. So leaving Miss Harvey to Norroy, I lured her forth into the garden and picked some flowers for her. It was evident that Norroy had an exceeding interest for her, which I put down to her new knowledge of his story. He bulked large in her eyes as a gay blade, even perhaps as a wicked spendthrift and a debauchee. But away from him she gave me more of her attention, and seemed more at her ease. I reverted to the light treatment I had previously been using. She had spoken of some famous gorge that should be visited — I think it was Fingle, and I sighed.

"Alas," said I, "I am on duty. I can't get away. I guard the portals with a flaming sword."

"Oh, I have heard how good you have been," she gushed forth, suddenly, unexpectedly. "You are standing between a — a friend and — and trouble."

It sounded nice set in that way; Miss Fuller had the faculty of transferring actions to a lofty plane, a plane at any rate of lofty considerations. I liked to think just then that I had been inspired by fine feelings, and not by a mere sense of fun and adventure.

"But I wonder, Mr. Brabazon, whether you ought to do it," she went on. "I know it 's difficult, sometimes, to see one's right way clearly. Of course," she added with some anxiety, "there is only one way of looking at the causes which have brought these things to pass."

Poor Norroy! He was a rascal, but then, you see, he had the reward of his defects, for he was interesting; he had arrested Miss Isabel's wondering eyes.

I demurred. "One never knows other people's temptation," I said, "and one ought n't to turn oneself into a little Day-of-judgment all to oneself."

"Of course I don't know anything about him," she hastened to say. "But I should have said any man ought to have been told to keep free from such complications."

After all Norroy was indefensible, which was one of the absurd reasons why I liked him. I feebly countered, as she would not admit broader principles.

"A good-natured easy-going man sometimes suffers from his extreme popularity."

"No man has a right to be popular at the expense of others," pronounced Miss Fuller, hardly. I had nothing to say; she glanced at me, and in quite a different tone added, "You are probably a popular man yourself, Mr. Brabazon."

"I am," I said promptly, resolved to change the current of our talk.

She seemed hardly to have expected this answer, and I know that she did n't quite approve of it.

"Some men," she said with greater reserve, "are merely popular with their own sex, which is easy enough to be, I suppose. Men don't go deep in their judgments," she averred.

"I am popular with both sexes," I hastened to say. "I 'm sure I don't know what they see in me."

Miss Fuller's mild face fixed itself in austere lines. "I don't think it 's quite nice to boast of it," she said.

"I did n't," I explained. "On the contrary I said I did n't know what they saw in me."

Miss Fuller seemed to be at a loss for an immediate answer, and, as is the habit of her sex, she deviated.

"I think it 's rather out of the world here."

"That 's the charm," I said.

"Oh, well," said Miss Fuller, dryly for her, "we find it a little too much so. We 'll have to get back."

I came to a pause in my walk. Somehow I had never thought of their leaving.

"Do you mean to tell me you 're going away?" I asked.

"We think of it," said she, admiring the laurels.

I shook my head at her. "Ah, Miss Fuller," I said, reproachfully, "and I thought you were my friend!"

"I — I don't understand you," she said faintly.

"I think," said I, "that unless I have some strong distraction I shall say something that no lady should hear; so please let us go back."

She turned obediently, and was much nicer to me on the way.

"Please tell Miss Forrest," I whispered as they left, "that she has n't half exhausted the beauties of the

neighborhood. Nor have I. And if you go I shan't be able to."

She laughed agreeably and said nothing; but I felt it was on Norroy that her gaze was directed shyly as they drove off. Such is the privilege of the wicked!

He had apparently enjoyed a wonderful hour with the lady, whose sympathy did not deter her from extreme merriment. In fact they were both laughing heartily when we came in.

"Mr. Brabazon," said she, briskly, "I 've got an idea. Mr. Eustace will regularly pine for want of air shut up here. Now there 's my car — "

"Miss Harvey 's been good enough to offer to take me out," said Sir Gilbert, pleased as a good boy, who is asking permission of his master.

It seemed feasible and I gave the permission. "Did you tell her who you were?" I asked him when the car was gone.

"No-o," he replied dubiously. "I did n't quite know whether to do so. You see, she might cut up rough."

"Why so?" I asked.

"Well, women don't like being taken in and all that," he said.

No; they did not. I had an instance in my mind, only too fresh and vivid. Perhaps he was right. The motor was to call the following day and make a breach through the trenches of the besiegers. Both Miss Harvey and Sir Gilbert looked forward to the prospect with delight. It was only I who had doubts.

But the whole face of the war underwent a revolution that succeeding night of June the tenth.

The annoyance of the death watch in the wall had irritated me so much that I had for some time had the

position of my bed changed. Yet when I went to sleep I dreamed of sounds in my ears, of a deadly pick upon crumbling walls, and of the secret passage to the sally-port filled with traitors. I woke to find the light creeping in behind the curtains, and, possessed by a feeling of unrest, I got up and walked to the window. I pulled aside the hangings and let in the early morning. It was three o'clock, and the gray sepulchral dawn invested the garden. The bare beds of the borders, wan and ghostly in that early hour, turned slowly to a warmer lilac. The stillness of the dead held the house.

The creaking of a board broke this deathly quiet, striking on my ears almost like a gunshot. Alert and alarmed and eager I went to the door and listened. For one moment I had forgotten that Norroy slept upstairs now, and was on the point of putting down the noise to his account in the next room, when I remembered.

I pushed open the door of his former chamber, which was ajar, and peered in. Nothing was visible, though the parted curtains let in a flood of dull light. I walked across to the window, which was shut; and I was turning away, when I was aware that the air here was much cooler. The next moment I saw the explanation and I thrilled. The glass of one pane had been wholly removed and the air of the garden flowed through.

I was now, as you may suppose, wide awake and agog with excitement. In my pajamas I hurried out, found Jackman's room, and woke him. Then I went up to the gallery to see if there was any sign of Norroy; but the door of the strong-room was fastened. Jackman joining me presently, we made an examination of the gallery from end to end, without result.

But the Castle was not small, and was full of convenient holes and crannies for a lurking foe. We had a long job before us, for that one of Horne's myrmidons had gained access during the night, I had no doubt whatever.

Broad day found us still searching, and searching in vain. We had exhausted the inhabited parts of the house, and attacked now the east wing in which the chambers were for the most part destitute of furniture. A few old tapestries covered the walls here and there, and occasionally we came upon a battered chest into which we peeped suspiciously. But no sign of the intruder was to be discovered. We rested at length, dusty, hot, tired and, speaking for myself, cross. Poor Jackman sat on a box and wiped a beady face with a dirty duster.

"He 's beat us, sir," he said in a melancholy voice.

"Not yet," I said, mustering my spirits. "And we have the whip hand in a way. We will starve him out."

"Perhaps he 's taken supplies, sir," suggested Jackman. There was that possibility to consider, of course; but I meant that the chase should be a stern chase, and, to vary the figure, that we should die in the last ditch.

I knocked up Norroy and gave him warning of the danger.

"By Jove!" he said. "Rum go!" he added; and to that again, "Well, I 'm damned!"

These ejaculations may have relieved his feelings, but they did not help us. He dressed cheerfully, with an air that would suggest that we had bungled the business and that he would settle it when he came down.

"The beggar must be hiding somewhere," he said illuminatingly. "What about the passage?"

That had occurred to me, although I did not see how the spy could be aware of the passage. But not knowing how the panel was opened, I had waited for him. He showed me the clip in the book-shelves, turned it, and the dark hole gaped at us. I explored it from end to end without result, and we retreated to breakfast. Jackman mounted guard at one door, and we locked the other so as not to be taken by surprise.

"They 're going to run it out to the post, old chap," said the baronet, eating a hearty meal.

"I 'll run 'em out into the horse-pond," I said angrily.

He was considering deeply, and paid no heed. "I 'll tell you what," he said, at length, "I could make a bolt for it in Miss Harvey's car, what?"

"No, you won't," said I, firmly. "You 'll stay here and I 'll see you through. Do you think I 'm going to be done by a parcel of bum bailiffs?"

"You 're a sportsman, Brabazon," said he, genially. "I 'll stay as long as you 'll have me. You see," he said in a different tone, "there are reasons I don't much want to quit."

"You need n't," I assured him. "If you 'll only be discreet, you 're as safe here as in the Bank of England! But, mind you, Norroy, you 've got to act warily while this fox is in the house. Jackman and I will start on a systematic hunt after breakfast."

"Look here, I 've got an idea," said Sir Gilbert, brightly. "Why not get in a dog?"

"A good thought," I cried. "We can raise one in the village, I dare say."

"Let 's ask Jackman. Damn it, if there was time I could get half a dozen from town."

Jackman, interrogated, knew of a man with a smart fox terrier, which breed seemed to meet with his master's approval; and it was arranged that we should take a lease of him. He arrived in the afternoon with his owner, a chubby rustic who held him in leash on a string, and adjured him intermittently to "ger-rup." He was a gay, vivacious animal, exhibited much interest in Jackman's calves and the coal-scuttle, and wagged an absurd stump of a tail as he observed me with bright eyes and cocked ears. I do not believe he had any idea for what purpose he was brought, or what were his duties. After persuading Norroy, who had brightened up sensibly on seeing the dog, to retire to his strong-room, we made a progress through the other chambers of the Castle, beginning with the inhabited portion. The dog enjoyed it very much at first, being evidently under the mistaken impression that he was on his way to a rat fight. Afterwards his interest perceptibly waned, and he followed his master languidly, only being roused to higher spirits again by an accidental encounter with Mrs. Jackman's cat on the stairs. For the rest, if there were any intruders latent in the house, it was no concern of the terrier's. I lost patience. We settled down moodily to the policy of starving out the stranger.

By nightfall we had no further news of him, and including Mr. Toosey, were all thoroughly exhausted — except Norroy, who remained cheerful. Moreover, the tension and anxiety had got on our nerves, and we were ready to start at a shadow, or at the breath of the wind. I went to bed, wearied, but was unable to sleep, and all night I intermittently listened for alien

noises. But the silence that enwrapped the Castle was profound.

The next day brought no alleviation of our strain, and Jackman visibly grew worn and troubled. I dared not venture away from the house, for I feared the rashness of my guest; and it was with infinite relief that I heard Miss Harvey's voice in the hall. I ran out to bless her and she almost ran into my arms.

"Oh, Sir Gilbert!" she exclaimed in dismay.

I was not similarly dismayed. She was like a blossom in a wilderness, bright and fragrant.

"I feel like that and more," I said. "But I won't."

"I 'm come for Mr. Eustace," she panted.

"Well," said I. "We 'll have to discuss that point. But before we do, there 's another that won't wait. And that 's this — I 'm not, and never have been, and never will be Sir Gilbert Norroy."

"Oh!" She exhibited some signs of confusion. "Of course, I know — I did n't mean to — "

"Do have faith," I pleaded. "I 've no alias and I 'm no incognito; I 'm plain Richard Brabazon, always at your service."

"Oh!" She looked astonished; and then: "Well, it does n't matter, anyway," she said. "I guess you 're just you."

"And that, my dear lady, is the most sensible way to take it," I said smiling. "I would n't care if you were twenty chorus girls."

"No; you 'd probably like me all the better," said she, laughing.

"I could n't," I said with a neat bow.

"I say, Brabazon, that beast of a fox terrier has ruined my — Oh, how d'ye do, Miss Harvey?"

Norroy's head had protruded through the door halfway through his complaint, and his face broadened in a grin.

"Are you ready?" she asked lightly.

"Eustace, we must explain," I said, and while he was getting his eye-glass fixed, I turned to her. "The fact is, Miss Harvey, the enemy has got through."

"What do you mean?" she asked startled.

"A man has gained admission to the Castle, and is hiding somewhere. We 're sure of that, but we can't find him. It 's getting warm."

"All the more reason that Mr. Eustace should come out," she declared boldly.

"Miss Harvey 's right," he said.

"Very well," I agreed, after a moment's consideration. "Your blood be on your own head."

"Oh, I guess it won't be our blood if it comes to a collision with my chauffeur," said she, laughing. Mrs. Jackman appeared at this juncture, and asked if she should prepare tea. I invited Miss Harvey's eye, and replied in the affirmative. It was decided that Norroy should go for his dangerous drive afterwards. Miss Harvey entered the morning-room, and took off her gloves, and in order to square the party properly, I sent for Mr. Peter Toosey.

On the whole I did not enjoy that tea-party as I had enjoyed its predecessors, but Miss Harvey and Norroy did not seem in the same case. Mr. Toosey, on the other hand, was as nervous as a cat. He listened at the doors, and seemed determined to find some one. Every entrance of Jackman startled him to his feet with a protecting eye on Sir Gilbert, who was all unconscious of this watchfulness and of these alarms, and was main-

taining what he thought a conversation with Miss Harvey. The morning-room, as I have explained, lay to the front of the Castle, and had doors upon either side communicating with different parts of the house. A third door opened widely on the lawn, and upon each side of it were long low embrasured windows, to which a dado of oak extended, and which was furnished with old oak window-seats of a capacious interior. In one of these retreats Norroy talked with Miss Harvey. For the reputed owner of the Castle I was being unconscionably neglected, and I was forced more or less back on the attentions of Mr. Toosey, who, as I say, was distracted by his recurrent suspicions. Suddenly he announced, after an excursion to one of the doors, that it was locked. His voice was significant and tragic, and the strangeness of his announcement took me at once to his side. Miss Harvey had heard, but not her companion. She looked across in wonder, while I tried the door.

In the middle of this scene the door on the further side opened, and a tall thin man of fifty appeared. With the leap of a jaguar Mr. Toosey was at the other end of the room.

"Quick, quick!" he cried, and in his excitement tore open one of the window-seats. "In here! In here!" he said hoarsely.

"Yes, yes," said Miss Harvey, taking the alarm, and in much less time than I take to relate the incident Sir Gilbert was bundled inside the seat and the lid clapped down on him. I think he yielded entirely to the girl's persuasion, for he was not wont to be bustled or to give way without explanations. But Miss Harvey had been fired with the trepidation of the artist, and now sat on

the closed lid breathlessly, defiantly, and stared furiously at the admitted stranger.

I say admitted, because it was manifest next moment that Mrs. Jackman had admitted him in the ordinary way. Jackman, of course, would never have been guilty of such a solecism as to introduce a visitor unannounced; but I remembered that he had been sent out on an errand, and Mrs. Jackman was only a good cook.

"Who are you?" thundered Mr. Toosey with an accusing finger at the intruder.

He gazed, blinked through glasses out of weak eyes, and began to stammer. It was just as I discovered that the door I was trying was not locked, but only jammed.

"Mr. — Mr. — I 'm the tuner," said the thin man, shamefacedly.

Mr. Toosey was abashed, and ere any one could speak, Mrs. Jackman came forward much flurried. "If you please, sir," she said, "it 's Mr. Sparks, the tuner. He always comes every quarter and I did n't know any one was in this room — I 'm sure I beg pardon, sir."

Miss Harvey burst into a merry laugh, and at the same time fell suddenly back in the seat, with her feet in the air. The rumblings of an earthquake convulsed the oak beneath her. I sprang to her assistance, just in time to be greeted by the face of Norroy protruding through the gap, red, dirty, and disconcerted, but still immaculately fitted with his eye-glass.

"Damn it, he 's got me, old chap!" he said in a plaintive voice.

We all stared at his amazing statement, including

the scared pianoforte tuner, while Sir Gilbert completed his extrication. Then he brushed the dust from his coat.

"I say, Brabazon, he 's been in there all the time. It 's a bit thick."

Suddenly comprehending, I pounced on the oak seat, and re-opened the fallen flap. In one corner of the void thus disclosed skulked a mean little man, all black with dust. I put in a hand and hauled him forth, and a cry of dismay arose from the assembly. Miss Harvey's eyes looked fire and mustard, and I really believe she would have fallen on the wretched creature for two hair-pins. I shook him.

"I 'll have the law on you for assault," he whined.

"Oh, chuck him out," said Sir Gilbert, dismally. "He 's done us;" and I saw that in his hand he held the dreaded writ.

I took him at his word. It was safest for the man, and, I think, pretty generous treatment in our frame of mind. I hauled him to the open door and ejected him; after which I don't think we gave him a further thought. The mischief was done; our plans were ruined; and we must acknowledge defeat.

"Hang it," said Sir Gilbert, dusting himself still. "Who the deuce would have thought the beggar was in there? Rough luck!"

Mrs. Jackman had had the sense to remove the innocent cause of all the trouble. Mr. Toosey, who was quite as responsible for it, brooded with clouded brows. I saw he was devising ideas fast.

"Damn it, what luck!" repeated Sir Gilbert, and remembered his manners. "Awfully sorry, Miss Harvey. I say, did I upset you?"

"No-o-not much," she said pensively, for she, too, was busy with her thoughts.

"Awfully sorry. I 'm a real whale, what?" he said, continuing the dusting process to his knees.

The fatal writ had fallen to the floor, and she picked it up. "Why — what 's this?" she said suddenly. "It 's — but it says Sir Gilbert Norroy!"

"That 's me!" said Mr. Eustace, sheepishly.

CHAPTER XIV

ANDROMEDA AND THE DRAGON

MISS Harvey stood silent for a moment, looking at him; then "This seems tangled up some," she said with a little laugh.

"I 'm awfully sorry," said Norroy. "I 've been a fool all round and all along."

"No one 's in a particular hurry to contradict," said Miss Harvey, but her face mitigated the brusquerie of her words. "You want some taking care of," she suggested. "Mr. Brabazon does n't seem quite happy with the job." Her eyes twinkled at me.

"No; I 'm a sad failure," said I. "But after all who shoved Sir Gilbert in?"

"Oh, we 're all in it," she said. "Don't let us recriminate." She looked at me. "What is to be done?" she asked with an anxious frown.

The situation was undoubtedly comic in some aspects, and if I had not been really chagrined I should have laughed. Norroy's difficulties seemed to have settled themselves by their own dead weight; he was, I thought, fading sensibly out of my purview.

"If I might suggest," said he at this juncture, "I should very much like that drive you spoke of." He was far less perturbed than we were, now that he had removed all the dust from his coat and trousers.

"Certainly," said Miss Harvey, and her voice trilled out in sudden merriment. "It 's so awfully like a

game we 've been playing and have got tired of," she said.

"I 'm pretty sick of it," said Sir Gilbert, good-humoredly.

"Won't you come, Mr. Brabazon?" called the girl in her sweetest voice. "I must get out of the way of thinking of you as Sir Gilbert."

"Why, did you think — ?" The real Sir Gilbert searched our faces critically, as if he suspected us of some duplicity.

"I have had the honor to run as your understudy," I said to him.

"Oh!" he grimaced. "Wish you joy!"

"I was told," said Miss Harvey, slyly, "that Sir Gilbert was in the neighborhood incog."

"Oh, Mrs. Jacker!" said he, with a nod. "I thought as much. She has a wagging tongue. Good Lord, Brabazon, do all the folk here take you for me? Great Scott, what a lark!"

"I fail to see the humor of it," I answered with dignity.

"Don't be ratty, man," he adjured. "Hiding in my own castle under another name! Not a bad idea," he exclaimed, suddenly struck by the brightness of it. "No one would have suspected if it had n't been for Mrs. Jacker. Damn! I wish I 'd thought of it."

We motored to the village, where Miss Harvey had to communicate our news to her friends. We all descended at Mrs. Lane's and went in after her, myself, I will confess, with some misgivings. Sir Gilbert took it easily, without showing consciousness of being either hero or scapegrace. It seemed that he was not concerned as to the opinion of either Miss Forrest or Miss

Fuller. Miss Harvey broke out with the facts, and Sir Gilbert stood modestly by. Miss Fuller could not keep sympathy out of her honest gaze, but I could not read Perdita's eyes.

"It is very awkward for — for Mr. Eustace," she said.

"For Sir Gilbert Norroy, my dear, for Sir Gilbert Norroy," said Christobel, triumphantly.

The faces of the two girls were mildly blank and civil, and Miss Harvey explained swiftly.

"Then Sir Gilbert has been masquerading," was Perdita's cold comment.

"Playing the goat!" agreed that gentleman, amiably, "and now he 's got to pay the piper."

I do not know what made me say it; and I really don't think it was malice. But I did say it.

"Oh, you 'll have to marry Miss Rivers," I said lightly.

"Miss Rivers!" said Miss Harvey, turning abruptly to me.

I was aware of my folly at once. "Miss Rivers of the north," I explained weakly, though it was no explanation.

"Not me," said Sir Gilbert, stoutly; and after a pensive moment, added: "But perhaps she 'd lend me a bit. I 've a good mind to write to her."

"I 've no doubt she would be anxious to do it on such excellent security," remarked Miss Fuller, with what seemed to me uncharacteristic irony.

"Is this lady — whatever her name is — wealthy?" inquired Miss Harvey.

"Heaps of tin, I believe, — manufacturers, you know," said Sir Gilbert, and with a total disregard for

others' interest in a question, which was one of his qualities, he barred the topic with his stubborn insensitiveness. "I say, had n't we better be off?"

I had to drive off with them, much against my will, and later, while Norroy was despatched on some purposeless errand by the lady, I had the privilege of being cross-questioned by her. She wanted to know who Miss Rivers might be. I told her that my own knowledge was limited, but I understood she was cousin to Sir Gilbert. "Daughter of the late Mr. Rivers of Rivers and Poulter, iron founders," I added.

"Oh!" said she, dubiously, and then, "Why did you say he ought to marry her?" she asked ruthlessly.

"A feeble jest," I replied, "merely arising from the fact that such a match was once planned by their forbears."

"Cradle matches," said Miss Harvey, sententiously, "are the most disgraceful offences against real civilization."

"They are the rotten fruit of an effete world," I agreed.

"I am surprised such a thing should be proposed in England," she went on slowly.

"Comparatively enlightened as she is," I added for her. "So am I. But Sir Gilbert takes a healthy view of it. He won't be bought and sold for any one's money. And no doubt," I added sarcastically, "he has an essentially aristocratic contempt for mere wealth."

She was silent, contemplating the view, but recurred to the subject presently, when I was thinking of something else.

"Do you think he ought to borrow money from her in the circumstances?"

"I think it 's risky for her," I said.

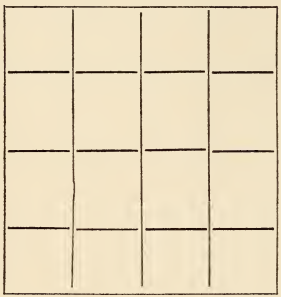
"I did n't mean that," she said impatiently, and then added crossly, "Men are so stupid."

I know they are; but I was glad to see Norroy stalking back through the bushes.

We had run over to Dartmoor, and it was not the last journey which Sir Gilbert was destined to make to that wilderness in that company. For the next day Miss Harvey and her mother called at the Castle with a cordial invitation that we should visit them at their hotel on the moor. I was not anxious to go, and made a mountain out of my neglected work. Alas, I had written but two pages since my inauguration in the Castle; and I had confidently expected so much from this quiet holiday in the west! Immediately afterwards, when I had definitely committed myself to my statement, I repented, for I learned by a casual remark that Miss Fuller and Perdita were to be invited. And so, when they drove off, I fell a prey to gloom and morosity, and I snapped Mr. Toosey's head off. To do him justice he did not much mind, being by now accustomed to my ways, but he watched me sadly from time to time as he painted. My conduct was the more unreasonable that I had voluntarily sought his company to console me. So, cross with myself, I wandered about the gallery, picking out books at random and examining them without interest. The day was a most perfect day in June, and the sun was bright overhead, its splendor tempered by a cool sea-breeze. I had gone down the length of the western wall, and reached the book-cases protruding into the room at the bottom, when I thought of the secret panel, and turned to it idly. I pressed the clip and opened it, stared in, and shut it again. As I

did so my eyes lighted on the genuine shelf immediately overhead. It contained a number of volumes of the *Annual Register*, but one was a stranger to the series, a "rogue," to use the gardener's parlance. This was the sole reason which induced me to take it down.

It was a copy of Bacon's "Novum Organum" dated in the eighteenth century, and I turned the leaves quite mechanically, before slapping it up again. But in that running flux of the pages my eye was caught by a diagram on the fly-leaf, and I went back to it. It was figured thus:



I studied it with the vague impression that it had reference to something within the covers of the Great Philosopher. Then I deciphered in smaller letters below — *Jasper N.* What was there familiar in the appearance of that?

Taking the book with me I went back to Toosey, and, having shed my ill humor, complimented him on the work which he was doing. He was pleased.

"The style is a little troublesome," he said, "but I 've got the hang of it at last."

I wondered if he suspected on what a nefarious task

he was engaged, and I smiled. "I shall have some difficulty with that one farther on," he said with a nod at it.

I went up to the wall and languidly examined the landscape he had indicated, and then my glance passed to the next picture, which was a portrait.

"Oh, that's Sir Jasper, and a thundering good one, too, but I don't do that," he said, seeing the direction of my gaze.

Sir Jasper! By sheer coincidence the name had fallen within my notice twice in five minutes. I opened the fly-leaf of my book. Undoubtedly this was the hand of Sir Jasper Norroy. I looked again at the portrait, which portrayed a bluff, low-lidded, insolent devil of a man. What in the name of conscience did he with annotations of Bacon? *20 Staires,* I read. I left Toosey and sped swiftly down the gallery till I reached the panel, pressed the clip, and entered the aperture. Striking a match I descended the stone stairs, counting carefully, and my match went out when I reached the fifteenth. I lit another and completed the twenty. Then I looked about me. The passage was narrow within the limits of the outer wall, being no more than three feet across, and was built in with brickwork. Below me, as I could discern by the flare of the match, it dipped a dozen feet or more farther. I continued to the end, and found the door of the sally-port, which I succeeded in getting open. The broad expanse of daylight greeted me, and I could see that the passage ended thus in a little shrubbery of laurels against the western wall. I closed the door and retraced my steps, and once more made a survey from the twentieth stair. There was no indication of any difference in the nature

of the wall, and, though I tried it as high as I could reach on both sides, I discovered nothing. Then it occurred to me that I should count from the bottom, and down I went to the sally-port and did so. But still no "find" rewarded my efforts. I emerged from the passage, dusty and hot, shut the panel, and went down to my room, taking the book.

I had fully made up my mind that there was some secret here, but how to unearth it? I pored over the cypher with its nest of rectangles, seeking for some clue; and then, resolving to return to it again, I put it aside and went out. The lovely afternoon made its call on me.

I roamed through the gardens and made my exit through the wicket gate in the sea-wall. The sea was bright and dancing, flecked by heads of foam so far as the eye could carry. The foreshore lay wet with the recent tide, which was moving out, and long trails of seaweed littered the rocks. I walked along the shingle, receiving the buffets of the brave wind with exhilaration, and, turning a corner, saw the cliffs on which Norroy and I had stood a night or two before. The cavern yawned to the vacant air. I went towards it. The tide was some distance out, raking on the sands, and the scene was very different from that on the occasion of my previous visit. Then it had been forbidding, lowering, ominous; to-day in the fine sunshine with the receded tide it had a holiday aspect. It did not seem as if the crisp bright sand could ever have been the cockpit of warring waters. And yet, looked at carefully, the cliff face held a certain menace, treacherously disguised. The chasm in it opened wide with interior and unfathomed blackness, as it might be

an ugly creature of prey, a dragon with its coils in the bowels of the earth, that yawned and slept in the sun after its appetite was appeased. In the outer shell of the cavern was only a whisper of the approaching sea; otherwise it was still and sombre and cold like death. It slept, but it would awake, awake to the champing of the foam about its ragged teeth, to the roaring of the flood-tide, to the gurgitation of that relentless maelstrom of waters in the narrow channel.

I was conscious of these possibilities in the monster while it basked in the sun, and then, under the influence of the usual human curiosity, I penetrated the inner cavity. I was here in a sort of twilight, and now the sounds of the outside world were dwindled to a mere murmur; the dank walls struck colder, and the seaweed and sea-moss on the rocks sent a chill into the blood when touched by the hand. I went farther in, and now all sounds ceased, and I stood in a world of silence, in the darkness and stillness of a world unheated and unlighted by any sun, as it might be in a world in its last stages of decay. I was glad to retreat to the sands before the cliffs, and, directly I emerged, my eye was caught by a figure between me and the advancing sea. I had turned from the dragon; here was my Andromeda. Blessing the good fortune which had brought about this conjunction I hastened towards her. She stooped as I came, took a stone from the beach, and, with a girlish hook of her arm, sent it spinning into the waves. I called to her, and, with one hand raised to retain her errant hat from the breeze she turned about, her vivid face rosy from her exercise, her gown snapping in the wind against her lissom body.

"So you did n't go?" I asked, as I reached her.

"You mean to Dartmoor? No, Isabel went. It 's a day for the sea, don't you think?" she added after a pause.

Since I had encountered her there, of course it was. The breeze played in the surfaces of our garments and carried our voices to a higher pitch. It was full of a salt savor and stung pleasantly. Screaming gulls wheeled in front of us, and dipped to the glistening water.

"And so you took me for Sir Gilbert!" I said abruptly.

She smiled a little. "We all did," she said, facing the freshening breeze.

I watched the hair ruffling under the wind that caressed it. "Well, altogether, we've had a regular comedy of errors," I said. She shot a glance at me. "I took Sir Gilbert for a rogue, and you took me for him."

"And you took me for a burglar," she said lightly.

"In my heart and on my soul, not really," I pleaded.

"Oh, that makes it less complete, — and less interesting," she added.

"We could n't very well add any more complications to it," I said.

She was silent, and then ventured, "unless Miss Harvey turned out a princess in her own right."

"As for that," I said, "she is that already. Don't you know Rule No. 42A — All American women are princesses in their own right."

She laughed at my small joke and looked around at the cliff.

"Is that your — Sir Gilbert's property?"

"I have my doubts. It depends how far the cave runs. The foreshore, I suppose, belongs to him, but

the tide marches into that open mouth every twelve hours. Yet I should say he had certain proprietary rights in the cavern. I've been exploring it. Shall we inspect it?"

She moved off with me in silent assent, and when we had got half way to the cliff turned as if reluctant to abandon her view of the sea.

> "'With chafe and change of surges chiming,
> The dashing channels rocked and rang,
> Large music, wave to wild wave timing,
> And all the choral water sang.'"

I quoted one of those magnificent stanzas, and her lips parted slightly as she drank in the music with the sea sounds and the sea air.

"Go on," she said, when I had finished.

"It is a night scene," I said. "If I were with you here by night it would be appropriate. But no," I added, remembering the burden of the poem, which was that of satiate love, "it would be most inappropriate. I should never walk with you in such a setting."

"I don't think I know the poem," she said innocently. "But it's beautiful."

I had risked her knowledge, and now I hardly cared if she should track it down, and with it my sentiments.

"It is by the greatest singer of the sea that has ever lived," I said. "It is Swinburne's."

"Tell me more of it?" she asked.

The sense of the words collected in my memory and shamed me. Never would I apply to her those vivid, languid, and hectic verses. But the beauty of them caught me up. "This is not you and I," I said. "This is some less fortunate couple at the end of their ideals. I believe we are fortunate enough to have them still.

"'The rustling sand and shingle shaken
With light sweet touches and small sound —
These could not move us, could not waken
Hearts to look forth, eyes to look round.

"'Silent we went an hour together,
Under grey skies by waters white,
Our hearts were full of windy weather,
Clouds and blown stars and broken light.'"

She said nothing, but turned and resumed her walk to the cliff, and I with her silent. "Silent we went —". Was it ominous? The sun merged suddenly in a passing cloud, and the cliff stood starkly in shadow — with its dark cavernous mouth.

"Is it far in?" asked Perdita, surveying the interior gloom doubtfully.

"We can go just as far as you like," I said.

We entered and penetrated the second cavern. "To go deeper we should want lights," I said. "But I should say it continued for some distance. This coast was a favorite resort of smugglers in the old days, and no doubt these caves were used by them for their illicit trade. It is more than hinted that Sir Gilbert's ancestors had a finger in the pie."

We lingered a little longer, and then withdrew into the larger and outer cavern which was comparatively full of light.

"Do you think people the happier for having ideals?" asked Perdita, abruptly. "Ideals that can be broken and so create in the heart a greater ruin than would otherwise have existed?"

"Oh, undoubtedly. I must n't quote you the old Tennysonian tag as to loving and losing. But, look at it how you will, the argument is in favor of ideals. On

the low plane of practical happiness you have what holds you up for years, until, indeed, that blow you dread; and at the highest, 'one needs must love the highest' — there is no alternative. It comes to this, that you can't help having ideals, and that you are the happier for any ideal you have, even if it be destined to be broken."

"Yes, you must be right," she said with a sigh. "But it's hard to puzzle out."

Idealism is a fascinating subject, and it has even more fascinating affinities, into which one is tempted to slide in conversation. After all there is no idealism so great, so absorbing and so unselfish as Love. Beside it religious devotion is but a thin-blooded passion, lacking the touch of earth which keeps it in relation with human things. I could have drifted into that supreme idealism, but for Perdita. She evaded the topic, seemed not to notice when I slipped and fell, waited demurely till I had recovered and joined her, when she talked on prettily again. So I was kept hanging on the fringe of a mighty matter, and sad and happy together. And at last Perdita remembered the time and the place. We went out of that cavern which had been lit for me with a radiance of fairyland.

It was odd, and even startling to notice the difference in the aspect of the sea. The tide had rolled in patiently, winning yard after yard of the shore, until it had reached the sea-line of rocks, where its advance became rapid. It was as though the resistance of the opposing land had been at last overcome and the spears of the tide were storming the shore in a serried rush. The flood came down upon the cliff and the caverns like a race-horse, — roaring, foaming, mouthing, menacing. Per-

dita uttered a little cry of alarm, and I put out a hand and drew her to me.

"There is plenty of time," I said reassuringly. "The utmost that can happen is that we may get a little wetting."

She made no resistance as I put her arm in mine, but she gazed at the sea fearfully and then looked away. I felt she had committed herself to my charge like a trusting child. I picked the way over the shrinking delta of sand towards the rocks round which the tide was spuming in its alternations of sally and retreat.

Just before we reached this refuge, a wave, running free and fast above its fellows, broke with a crash on the shore and submerged us to the ankles. I stooped, lifted Perdita bodily in my arms and set her on the rock, joining her a moment later. The tide sucked round the base of our resting-place, drawing out with reluctance. I cast an eye towards the rising ground behind us. The cliffs here descended quite low and were not more than twenty feet above the level of the sands. But the way to it was a mere track of big boulders. We scrambled over them as best we might, until we reached the steep face fifteen paces away. From here the cliff swooped outwards, and, where it descended to an easy level, the tide was already breaking. The wall before us was not a very difficult one for a man to scale, but it had obvious terrors for a woman in skirts and with delicate and unaccustomed hands. I made up my mind to a course at once.

"We'll get a bad ducking if we try to go along the cliff," I said. "I want you to put yourself in my hands. There's absolutely no danger."

For a moment she hesitated; her color had gone,

We scrambled over them as best we might, until we reached the steep face fifteen paces away

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and she looked anxious. Then she put her hand in mine.

"Yes," she said simply.

If nothing else could do it that simple confidence would have inspired me. I stooped, made a back, and put my clasped hands behind me, palms uppermost. Have you seen boys help each other over a wall to rob orchards? Well, that was my primitive plan. Perdita mounted, and I gripped her small feet, and I felt her knees in my back. I encouraged her and she scrambled to my shoulders.

"Now step upon the ledge just over me," I enjoined. "You will find a projection to cling by above."

Skirts drifted against my face, the weight lifted from my back, and I knew she had done what I wanted. The tide was thundering over the rocks towards us. She was clinging with both hands to the angle I had mentioned, and her two little feet were firmly set in the niche on the level of my neck. Above was another step, but she could not reach it in her retarding skirts; she must have an intermediate stage.

"I am going to make a ladder step for you," I said, "and you can mount to the next ledge."

There was no time for explanations. What had to be done I had to do at once. I took hold of her ankles fast in both hands, and pushed my right arm upwards, steadying my body against the wall.

"Now step upwards," I called out, and I pushed forward my left arm.

For an instant the whole burden of her sweet body rested on my wrists, and then I knew she had reached the second ledge. Good! I breathed more freely. She was nearly half-way. I mounted to the ledge she

had left and put my arm round her waist to give her assurance.

"Not afraid?" I asked lightly.

She shook her head. We repeated the mounting process by the ladder of my hands, and so both attained a wide breach in the cliff within reach of the top, where we rested. We both breathed heavily.

"My dear, how brave!" I said, touching her hand.

She said nothing, but the pallor receded from her face, and a faint color charged it. Her eyes were bright as if the tears bedewed them. Was I a beast? But I could not have helped it. Nor could I help what I did. One acts sometimes under a violent reaction. I put an arm about her, drawing her closer.

"You shan't fall, dearest," I said. "I will protect you."

Still she said nothing, nor did she look at me. Her heart beat quickly under my hand. Was she frightened? I could not say. I experienced the vertigo of acute emotions, but I should not have fallen had I been a thousand feet above safety. "Come!" said I, gently.

The rest of the way was easy, and we gained the summit. Her hand lay weakly in mine as I set her in safety, and glanced down.

Below, a little way to the left, the tide was leaping into the black mouth of the monster, and raising the reverberations of the interior caverns.

CHAPTER XV

THE EMPTY BOAT

WE reached the wicket gate into the Castle grounds in silence, but my glances showed me that Perdita was in the grip of some emotion. I wondered if it were fear, or anger, or — was it something else? We had not moved a dozen paces from the wall when it flashed upon me out of the smiling heaven that I had directed and she had obeyed. She had entered my garden of roses in implicit obedience to my hand; she had done what I, the man, enforced. She had surrendered herself to me, her will to mine. How much did it mean? Was she still but the child in her terror, seeking refuge with the stronger arm? Or — ? That blessed alternative held me thrilled. In that supreme moment of emotion, of leaping and inspiring passion, as of a devotee before his goddess's shrine, I had beheld her turn into my garden. She accepted my lead, and walked shyly, with averted face, with heaving bosom — !

I stared unhearingly into Jackman's face as he met us, deferential and grave as ever.

"What?" I said, conscious only of Perdita and the waving June green. In the distance my eye was caught by an overarching yew, through which lovers might pass. It led into the bowling green, and lovers for generations had, of course, passed under it to play

bowls. Drake was playing bowls when the Spanish Fleet hove in sight. To play bowls!

"What?" I said, trying to fix my mind on Jackman.

I knew he was speaking, but my pulse was leaping and my mind was jumping. It had bolted like a fresh or frightened horse. I reined it in.

"And Sir Gilbert being out, sir, I took the liberty of coming to you."

"Yes, yes," I answered. "Quite right, Jackman. I'll see the gentleman. I'll —"

I turned and Perdita had melted away. Only Jackman and I held possession of the copse. I gazed along the path which wound through the hazels with dulling senses, with gradually increasing sobriety. I understood now; Sir Gilbert's solicitor had called. But — the winding little path through hazel and birch was empty. I moved on. The overarching yew was hidden from my gaze. I moved mechanically on, Jackman attending like a shadow.

Mr. Raymond Donaldson was a man of fifty, of exceedingly refined and contained appearance, and of immaculate dress. His thin lips, shaven close, moved almost imperceptibly as he related his story. He had happened to have business in Plymouth, and had taken the chance of finding Sir Gilbert Norroy by breaking his journey.

"He will be chagrined to have missed you," I said. "I suppose it is that matter of the writ."

Mr. Donaldson cast me a glance from beneath his lowered lids. "I have understood from Sir Gilbert Norroy's letter that you are in his confidence in this matter, Mr. Brabazon," he said formally. I bowed. "I am, therefore, glad to be able to talk with you as"

— he pulled out his watch — "it does not seem likely that I shall have the pleasure of seeing Sir Gilbert. Yes; it is that somewhat unpleasant matter."

"The history of the debt seems odd," I ventured.

"A little unusual," said Mr. Donaldson, "but by no means exceptional. The purchase of debts is often resorted to for one purpose or another."

"We should like to know the purpose in this case," said I. Mr. Donaldson considered the air.

"It would seem that there is a purchaser for the estate," he said in his dry voice. "I may say, Mr. Brabazon, that I was approached some time back by a firm of solicitors of repute with regard to the mortgage, which I am free, in the circumstances, to tell you that I hold on the property. I, however, would not sell."

"And it is impossible to raise this money?" I asked bluntly.

"The value of the estate," said Mr. Donaldson, precisely, "would not suffice to cover the debts of the estate plus the mortgage."

I was silent. "It seems a hopeless outlook," I said at last.

"To be frank with you, my dear sir," said Mr. Donaldson, "I see no chance of staving off the bankruptcy, if these people proceed to extremities."

"Oh, I think we may take it for granted that they will," said I.

"I have made some inquiries," he went on, "and have found that Mr. Horne is a commission agent in the city, not, I gather, of any considerable position."

"And Naylor?" I asked.

"Naylor!" he echoed. "I do not know of any Naylor."

Of course not; I had forgotten that the connection between the two men had only been established by my observation, and might even be chimerical. Yet had not a Naylor desired to purchase the estate? In my view, this Horne was acting in the interests of Mr. Naylor, who had a fancy for a fine gentleman's country seat. And it seemed as if he would get what he wanted, and had plotted for.

Mr. Donaldson's time-table called him inexorably away, and he left without helping much to the solution of the problem. His last word was characteristic of the lawyer.

"There is only one possible chance, Mr. Brabazon, and that is that negotiations might prove these people to be lenient."

"They won't; they want the Castle," I said.

He looked at me as though he would ask me on what I presumed to make this astonishing statement. But he apparently decided not to put his interrogation into words.

"So far," he proceeded instead, "the parties are only taking such steps as they are justified in taking to protect their legal rights."

Oh, this jargon! It was designed to snub me for venturing to take a leap in the dark. But I could do sums in my head without counting on my fingers. I saw there was no hope from Mr. Raymond Donaldson.

He rose.

"Naturally I will do anything I can in Sir Gilbert's interests. We will hold our mortgage. The late Sir Edmund Norroy," he nodded, as if by way of explanation, "was a valued client of ours."

As I watched him depart, walking, as he talked, with

all due reserve, and no doubt without prejudice, I reflected that a wealthy marriage alone would save Sir Gilbert. And when a little later the motor-car rushed up with two laughing people behind the chauffeur, the thought recurred.

"I say," said Norroy, after Miss Harvey had gone, "those beggars are not gone yet. I saw what's-his-name — Horne — in the village as we came through. Now they've winged me, why don't they clear out?" He meditated. "I've a damn good mind to try and strike a bargain with him," he mused.

I roused him from this brown study to give him news of Mr. Donaldson. Perhaps his idea was right, coinciding as it marvellously did with the lawyer's. Personal negotiation might effect some compromise. But still I remembered Naylor and my theory of the whole plot. I had a friend of splendid capability, deep in London life, a bright man of business, and a rising figure in society. I resolved to write to him to see if he could trace Mr. Naylor. An admirable man of affairs, he would know the ropes better than any one else with whom I was acquainted. As a matter of fact I wrote that night.

"By Jove! I'll do it; I'll see the little bounder," was Norroy's conclusion, on hearing what I had to report of his solicitor.

Miss Harvey had brought with her her own bright atmosphere, and some news that rekindled fires anew in me. If the wondrous weather held, it was designed (needless to say, by herself) to have a picnic on one of the islets in the estuary. They had it all cut and dried. Miss Fuller had expressed her intention of persuading Miss Forrest to go, and, indeed, they had called at

Mrs. Lane's on the way back with the express hope of getting her consent. But Perdita had been out. I made the requisite calculation and found that Perdita should have reached home long before their arrival in Southington. She had not, then, gone straight back. Where had she wandered? And why?

A flood of soft emotion filled my heart, and I hardly heard Miss Harvey talking. But I know I assented warmly, nay furiously, to her proposal of the picnic. And after a futile attempt at work on the following morning, I bolted my lunch and went down to the village before the hour appointed. Norroy had gone forth earlier in an attempt to find Horne, and I forgot in my self-absorption that Miss Harvey had hospitably included Mr. Toosey in her invitation. I do not know that this was not a device to pair the party suitably, for otherwise we should have been five. Anyhow, I forgot him and left him to follow by himself.

On arriving at Southington I sought Mrs. Lane's cottage at once, and asked for Miss Forrest. In the sitting-room were both girls, but it was Miss Fuller who came forward to greet me.

"Are you ready?" I asked.

"Oh, but it is n't time, is it? Miss Harvey said four," she cried.

"I am like the boy who got up in the middle of the night to go to his sports," I said lightly. "I have a homesickness for that island."

Perdita laughed over her face, but with no sound, and her face was bright and rosy.

"And you," I said, taking her hand. "You are coming?"

"Yes," she said faintly. "It will be pretty out there,

won't it?" she added, withdrawing her hand and arranging a book nervously on the table.

"It will be divine, and, by the way, here is Mr. Peter Toosey, specially got up for the function, as a Venetian boatman. What are you going as?"

They looked eagerly through the window at the estimable Toosey, in velveteens and an "art" tie.

"What are you going as?" parried Miss Fuller, archly.

"Oh, I've been so long masquerading apparently as the proprietor of the Castle, that I'm going as myself for a change. Will you go as yourself, Miss Forrest?" To my amazement she lost her color, and looked at me almost appealingly. "You can't improve upon yourself," I murmured to her in a low voice.

"She shall go as a princess in disguise," flashed forth Miss Fuller, gayly. "Perdita, dear, it's time you dressed the part."

I waited for them, and accompanied them to the jetty, where my old friend Hawes had the boat in readiness. Here we were joined at intervals by Mr. Toosey and Sir Gilbert.

"I've been hunting for that little beggar all the morning," said the latter, plaintively. "He's been at the inn, but they say he went down to the Point. I say, Miss Fuller, would you like my coat to sit on? Those seats are hard."

She looked as if she were going to accept, but refused. "No, thank you. I'm quite comfortable." I knew she was thinking of Christobel. I have never met any one so wonderful as Miss Fuller. Perdita sat by me in the stern, for I had the strings of the rudder, Norroy being ignorant of the craftsmanship of the sea. Miss Harvey

arrived late, and overflowing with spirits. We were launched in sunshine and gayety.

Mr. Toosey in his velveteens displayed a handiness in the boat which made my task easy, and we sailed an unruffled summer sea at a gentle pace. We tacked down to the Point, returned along the eastern wood-fringed shore, and finally made our islet. It was a hundred yards or so in length and perhaps fifty in breadth; but it had a generous shelter of trees, and we rested in the ample shade and made our tea, and ate our sandwiches on a table-cloth brought by that judicious housekeeper, Miss Fuller. Then we told tales, and I wish you could have heard Mr. Toosey's story of pirates he had escaped in Barbary. It was horrific, it raised the hair, and protestations from the ladies. What he mistook for pirates were probably artists dressed like himself and of a similar appearance; but I am bound to say his tale was as credible as mine which I frankly stole from a penny-dreadful I had read in the train. So far as I could make out from his involved way of telling *his*, Sir Gilbert's concerned a horse that he had backed and a man who asked him to fight a duel and one of them was killed. I was left in doubt if it were the horse but hoped so. Miss Fuller's was a story of a romantic gorge in Wales which she had visited, and dealt with a man whose sweetheart was killed by falling over it, and who, thereupon, haunted it till he joined her in the underworld. Miss Harvey told us how old man Simmonds of Chicago bested his rivals in a wheat deal, but I don't think dear Perdita understood it perfectly owing to its technical terms. And hers?

"The cliffs of Outremer," began Perdita in her soft,

sweet voice, "were a formidable precipice that descended sheer to the rocks of the seashore, where the waters beat, and the tangles of seaweed forever waved in the breeze. And in the base of the cliffs was a vast cavern."

I stirred, and slowly looked at her. She was gazing before her at the sea which rolled in upon our little beach. "It was an evil cavern," she went on, "and was reputed to be haunted by gnomes and wicked spirits." It thrilled me to think that we had both been captured by the same fancy. We had not exchanged views of the cave, but it had impressed her imagination as it had mine. And she had not feared to carry back my thoughts to that episode. Perdita!

"In the entrance to the cavern, it was said, at times an apparition of a maiden was to be seen, lying on the sands between the rocks and singing a wild song in days of storm. And when the wind was highest, and the night was deepest, mariners who passed those dreaded rocks at sea would hear her voice mingling with the noises of the elements, and would shudder and cross themselves. But one day a young fisherman . . ."

I listened, rapt, while Perdita's gallant adventurer braved the terrors of the cliffs, and penetrated into the cavern in the moonlight to find the beautiful Loreley who sang. And I heard how the gnomes and the evil spirits of the underworld tormented him, and how he fought them, and at infinite cost to himself conquered them, and how at last he found the maiden, and, behold, she was but a hag in seaweed and kelp, and her face wore the wrinkles of a thousand years of evil; so that the young fisherman in horror fled from her presence, and out into the open, where the waters seized him

and buffeted him, and he lay drowned in the depths of the sea.

"And that," said ruthless Perdita," was how the young fisherman met his death for an ideal. If he had been content to live among his own folk he would have married and lived happily ever afterwards. And as to which is the better fate, judge you between them."

"Oh, Perdita, Perdita!" I whispered under cover of a sudden outbreak of comment and protest. "It is all directed at me. But what care I? My faith is fixed. It is among the stars and with Perdita."

A smile in which playfulness trembled shyly with tenderness flitted towards me.

"The beggar ought to have stayed at home," said Norroy, taking the cigar from his mouth. "I only wish I had a home to stay at."

Miss Harvey laughed, and then, "Why," she said suddenly, "I hope that boat is n't coming here."

We all looked, and saw a sailing-boat riding the waters a few hundred yards away. While we stared the tiller was put up, and she went off on a new course the other side of the island.

"Surely, they would n't have the cheek," said Sir Gilbert.

"Let us say the heart," I corrected.

After that Miss Harvey sang some songs in her beautiful voice, and I drew nearer to Perdita.

"Eight o'clock, by Jove!" said Sir Gilbert at last, and rose and turned round, as if he were listening to something.

"Dear me, we must get back," sighed Miss Harvey. "But it has been glorious."

"I'll see about the boat," said Sir Gilbert, and

vanished into the bushes; for the boat was on the other side of the island, high and dry, and tied fast to a tree, to secure it.

"Do sing again!" pleaded Miss Fuller, enthusiastically. Good-naturedly Miss Harvey acceded.

" 'Die schönste Jungfrau sitzet dort oben wunderbar.
Ihr goldenes Geschmeide blitzet sie Kämmt ihr goldenes Haar;
Sie Kämmt es mit goldenem Kämme und singt ein Lied dabei;
Das hat eine wundersame, gewaltige Melodei.' "

Perdita caught my eyes on her, and the flush in her face grew deeper.

"But my Loreley has not golden hair," I whispered, "and I hope, (oh, how I hope!) she has not a cold heart. Do you know gold hair and cold heart go together, Perdita? Oh, my love is like a red, red rose and has the rich warmth of that color in her heart. Turn your face a little that way, sweetheart. So; your profile is divine, and I can see your demure eyelashes. 'Behold thou art fair, my love? Thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks.' Why did you dare to provoke me with that false tale, Perdita? Oh, how had you the heart? Did you feel me breathe a kiss towards you as I carried you up the cliff? I did — I did, and I am not ashamed; I would do it again. Why did you run away, child? 'Oh, my lost love, my own, own love!' I think you were called Perdita because you are lost to all others — all others that desire you save one. I wonder who that is. I will find out some day, Perdita."

Miss Harvey was singing another German folk-song — "*Vergiss mein nicht . . .*" Perdita listened, her head averted slightly from me.

"Will you go away and forget me, Perdita? I believe you would if you could, little wanton. But you shall

not. I will leave my mark upon you. If you escape the ogre you shall at least remember him. Did I say my love had dove's eyes? Why, they flash like a tiger's. '*Vergiss mein nicht*'— forget me not, Perdita!"

"I wonder where Sir Gilbert has got to," said Miss Harvey, as she finished.

Mr. Toosey got to his feet; the water rolled in burnished ripples to our feet, and the setting sun lighted the green fringes of the opposing shore and struck a golden pathway over the water.

Perdita had not spoken one single word, and as I also rose I saw the fulness of her face, and it was flushed like the sunset over the hills and her eyes were deep and dewy. I passed on with Toosey to find Norroy, my heart bright like the morning. Sir Gilbert was not at the little strand where we had beached our boat, and the boat was gone. It occurred to me that he had launched her, and was paddling round the island, but Toosey's voice arrested me.

"It's gone — it's off," he called. "What's that? Look!" I followed his finger, and perceived an empty boat tossing on the broken water a hundred yards away; and from that my eyes carried on to a boat further out with sails set, drawing out down the estuary.

"What the mischief — ?" I began, and then raised my voice and shouted.

It was plainly our boat broken loose somehow from the unaccustomed hands of Sir Gilbert Norroy. I shouted to draw the attention of the second boat. But it was sliding down on the outgoing tide, under the quickening vesper breeze. My shouts were unheard; at least they met with no response. And yet I could not think that my voice had not carried so far. I saw her

bow taking the spray; she passed momently farther away, leaving our craft a helpless derelict, at the mercy of the sea. In consternation I turned round. Where was Norroy? The island had no trace of him. He had vanished.

CHAPTER XVI

"IN A DEEP SEA LIKE DEATH"

TOOSEY and I ransacked the island without result. Whatever had become of Norroy he was no longer there; and we made our way back to the ladies puzzled, anxious, and even alarmed by the situation. We found them in some perturbation, having heard my shouts, and this was in no way allayed on receiving our news.

"But Sir Gilbert!" said Miss Harvey. "He must be — He can't be drowned!" she cried, white as her dress.

"Not a bit of it," said I, cheerily. "If he had met with an accident it would have been seen by those in the other boat."

I had been thinking things out, but I had not got very much beyond this conclusion, which also seemed insecure. It was Mr. Toosey who startled us all.

"Sir Gilbert has been kidnapped," he remarked breathlessly.

"Kidnapped!" Miss Harvey's repetition embodied the amazement of each.

"You see," said Toosey, warming to his subject and getting excited. "You have to eliminate all impossibilities, and what 's left is the fact. Now, take it that Sir Gilbert went, as he did, to get the boat loose and

launched. He succeeded, of course. If he had put out (which is unlikely, as he is no sailor) and had met with an accident, as Mr. Brabazon says, this would have been noticed by a boat which was only a short distance off. Now note; the people in the second boat must have seen the drifting boat. And yet they did not take it in tow, or give notice to any one left on the island. On the contrary they paid no heed to Mr. Brabazon's shouts. This proves that they purposely neglected the boat — also that they had previous cognizance of it. I take it that this is what happened, if we reconstruct the incident. Sir Gilbert looses the boat, is surprised by the occupants of the other boat, and knocked on the head. Then they put off with him, leaving our boat adrift."

He looked from one to another of us in a challenge, but we did not speak. For once Mr. Toosey's theories seemed to us feasible; only Miss Fuller broke out plaintively.

"But people don't do such things in the twentieth century."

Mr. Toosey, holding the floor triumphantly, turned to her.

"My dear lady," he said, "I should not like to put a limit to what human nature is capable of. The Barbary pirates — "

"Oh, don't let 's talk about Barbary pirates when we 're in this dreadful uncertainty," broke in Miss Harvey. "What is to be done, Mr. Brabazon?"

"We are in a quandary ourselves," I said. "We have no means of getting ashore. Mr. Toosey's version is possible, and, guessing as much as I guess of the people we have had to deal with lately, even probable.

The first thing to consider, then, is how to get off. We must signal to the mainland."

That was the pressing duty, and we drowned our other contingent cares in its active performance. First, we collected all the handkerchiefs of the party, and, fixing them together into a white flag, ran this up to the end of a pole, which we stuck in a conspicuous place on the side of the islet and towards Southington. But that was only the opening of our campaign; we could not be dependent on a mere flag. Of course it was always possible that some boat returning down the estuary might pass near us, but that chance was lessening every minute with the fall of the twilight. Our chief design was to build a bonfire; and in order to keep the girls from growing alarmed, I despatched them to search the isle for fuel. The island was grown with bushes, fringed with willows and tamarisk, and occupied by a few oaks and elms at intervals amid the undergrowth. The débris of past autumns and winters had accumulated underfoot, and it was not difficult to collect a large pile of dead wood and dead leaves. Then we kindled our pyre, and stood aside to watch it flare. Smoke and flame mounted to heaven in leaps, and we were all confident that the conflagration must be easily seen in Southington. Certainly this must have been so, but our mistake lay in imagining the villagers would interpret our fire for a signal of distress. As a matter of fact they did not, and, though we maintained our beacon for more than two hours, it aroused no curiosity and brought no relief. By that time the ladies had begun to despair.

Night long since had settled on us, yet not profound darkness. Night in midsummer seems to partake of

a forgotten cousinship with the day. It is a luminous darkness that prevails, and encumbers the night as with a lucid mist. I could stand by the babbling shore and pierce the brooding veil upon the sea with the shafts of my eyes, and feel none of the oppression of that blankness that falls with night in winter. And I could descry also the remote and twinkling lights of Southington over waters that were not black but rather ghostly. Distress had settled upon us also with the darkness. The girls made no complaint, but resigned themselves, as their sex will always resign in its primitive way to destiny. In my heart, and I think in Toosey's also, rebellion bubbled up still, determination was still unquenched.

"How far would you put it to the mainland?" I asked the artist.

"Three quarters of a mile or so," he replied.

"What about swimming?"

He shook his head. "I can't swim a stroke," he said sadly.

"I don't think I could stay it," I said. "But something must be done. I wonder."

I went on wondering while the fire flamed to heaven, and the three girls sat forlornly watching it and the unresponsive ocean. I examined my watch and found it close on eleven. We were destined to remain prisoners all night. I would give Fate twenty minutes longer.

We filled the interval, Toosey and I, in preparing a protection of branches for the ladies. With this rude screen behind them and the blazing fire in front, they would take no harm from the night airs or the damp. Then I beckoned Toosey away and told him.

"Keep them from worrying," I enjoined. "Let them rest if they can. I will do my best."

He looked doubtful; but the cast of the shore now seemed to me not so distant. I stripped myself to my underclothes, and with a farewell to him launched out into the water from the lower side of the island. I was aware from the outset that everything depended on the currents. The tide was drawing strongly under me and bore me slantwise down stream. I could see the lights of the shore moving with each stroke, and I labored, not to make a direct passage, but to take advantage of the tide. If I were fortunate I reckoned that I should come ashore somewhere between Southington and the Point. I swam for some time steadily, occasionally with the side stroke, and now and again on my back. The water was rather cold and I felt chilled. But if I was making way, as I hoped, I was not afraid now of failing to stay the distance. Underneath me was a swathing whirl of water. I swam easily . . . too easily, it occurred to me with alarm. I glanced at the shore, and saw the lights had fallen behind. I was in the tow of a fierce current, and I realized with a thrill that I was going down midstream like a piece of wood. I was being carried out to the mouth of the estuary and the open sea.

From that moment of realization I abandoned any thought of the Southington shore and strove to work backwards. The currents with which I had started did not seem to have been so strong as that which now had me. I beat for the other shore desperately, fighting with nail and claw. The water was broken by the roughening wind and chopped in my face; it lapped against me as if moving outwards, but I thought that

if I could get under the lee of the land I should at least be in a quieter sea.

I battled for half an hour with the tide, and at the end I could not say if I had succeeded. Darkness had now eclipsed everything; no lights were visible, and for all that I knew I might be wrestling in mid-channel. I strove now quite blindly, fighting every inch of the way with the tide, and instinctively throwing myself in opposition to it. If I could breast that demon, I knew it spelt safety; beyond and without, there was nothing but death.

The roar of the water was like monstrous droning bagpipes in my ears. I shut my eyes and clenched my teeth and battered against the waves. And soon I was aware that the chill was creeping upwards from my feet. Of a sudden the dying words of Socrates came into my mind — how oddly! "When the cold reaches my heart I shall die." The thought lashed me to a maddened effort. My failing arms went through the water mechanically and did not seem to belong to me. They were dull implements that moved without sensation and had no relation with living things. Yet there was some vague pain connected with them. I wondered if I had the power to stop, or whether these arms would not go beating on after I had sunk fathoms deep and tossed with tangle and shell. It appeared now an easy matter to go down and down, and not very objectionable. It only meant sinking a little lower, so that the salt water covered one's mouth not part of the time but all the time, and then the heavy press of slow, tangible, gurgling stuff about one's face and over one's head — sheets of light in the brain, such as flashed now through my eyes in the darkness, a dull and even murmur of

water, around, in the ears, in the mind, everywhere, a burning in the throat, such as gripped me now, a gentle, gradual, nay, even comfortable, settlement into the element about me. I was one with the water, one with the waves, all darkness about me, save one gleam across the mind, like the light of Southington village. I felt a consciousness in my leg, and then it ceased, and I was numb again.

The light in my mind faded from brightness into twilight; it wavered about a figure which I could not determine, and then went out. I did not know if my arms were moving still, or my head were under water. There was no pain now, and no desire to go on. I was just at rest — at one with the water. . . .

I was conscious of a blow which caused no pain, but merely stirred me, and I awoke with no physical senses about me, but merely to that lightning flash in the brain. Deep down in that central self which was I, I was aware of the words "I sleep but my heart waketh." I seemed to repeat them, but outside the central self was silence — silence, and now a growing pain in every part of me.

Something pressed my numb back; a sound floated into my ears . . . sounds, and one the indeterminate low voice of the sea that I had once heard, and another . . . what was that other?

It was a voice . . . words . . . My eyes fell open, and something brushed my face; something as it were rain from heaven dripped upon my forehead, which was burning. Something moved upon my breast, and it was a hand. I wondered if it was my hand. And then a face pressed close against my hot brow, and I heard the voice again . . . words . . .

"My darling . . . my darling . . ."

I tried to lift my hand, but it did not belong to me. I opened my mouth, but I made no sound.

"Perdita!" I murmured in that central self where all things are registered when speech and hearing and sight and life are not.

The rain gushed from her eyes. . . . I saw I was lying on a shore among dark bushes, stars in heaven, and a woman's arms about me. . . .

I do not know how long it was afterwards that I found Toosey supporting me with one arm while he held a flask to my lips with his other hand. I had come to life again; and the whole audible and visible world jumped up round about me as of yore.

It was not until a good deal later, not in fact until I was revolving the matter fully next day, that I was able to form a reasonable theory as to what had happened to me. It was clear that my frantic efforts to reach the shore had resulted in taking me nearer to it than I had known. At one time, indeed, as I guessed, I must have been only a hundred yards from the creek which leads up to Baring. But here I had got into the race which forms on the tail of the outgoing tide towards the island, and on that current I was thrown up on my point of departure.

I recovered slowly, but presently under Toosey's kindly administrations I was able to get into my clothes again. The dear man was much concerned about me, shook his head over my rashness, and said all was well on the island. My absence had not been discovered. I experienced a sudden odd sensation. Was it a mirage that I had seen? Was it merely in my dreams that Perdita had been weeping over me and holding me in

her arms, and wringing her hands? Toosey's cheerfulness was salient, almost false in effect. I had some doubts about him. I rested at length upon the ground, too much exhausted to walk, or even to ask questions; and by and by I was aware that he had stolen away.

I heard the water lapping on the sea beach, and the breeze whispering in the trees; and when I opened my eyes next I saw a white form between the parted bushes and some one looking at me.

"Perdita!" I called, "Perdita!"

She came a little nearer, so near that I put out a hand and weakly seized her skirt. She stooped, and I caught her about the neck.

"It was you, then!" I said. "It was you, my darling."

She descended upon me, lying there, and put her face to mine, and sobbed and kissed me. Her cold pale face rested on mine; she sobbed and pressed close to me, and called me her dearest and her love. Passion sprang from her in a fount and overflowed me. Through all the reserves and embankments of her maiden heart it broke in a clear full torrent upon me. She was mine, eternally and irrevocably mine!

We sat, talking but little, into the morning, content to live and breathe and be together. In the east the chill of the approaching dawn heralded a new day, and the waste of water emerged from its black shroud into a grayness. What roused me at last from my happy reverie was a shout, and then a second. Perdita rose swiftly and flew like a roe through the bushes; and I managed to get to my feet, stiff and sore and aching.

"Brabazon!" Toosey's voice conveyed to me. "A boat! A rescue!"

I made my way with difficulty to the other side of the isle and joined the excited party. Out of the loosening darkness a dim shape was advancing on the water. Toosey hailed it, and was answered back. It rushed on us like a monstrous bird, checked, swerved, and slid with its nose upon the sand. In five minutes we were all on board.

Hawes, the boatman, who had the tiller, now gave us his story. The empty tossing boat seen off the Point had spread dismay earlier in the night; but it was not known in what direction to look for us. Word travelled to Southington, where the fire furnished the necessary direction. In view of the discovery of the boat, this took on a new and grave importance. Hence the expedition which rescued us.

Now that our troubles were past, an exceeding cheerfulness prevailed. Miss Fuller had already begun to see the adventure in romantic perspective; Miss Harvey was practical and talkative. It seemed that she had fallen asleep in the comfort of the fire.

"Well, you can call it an experience," she declared. "But I don't think I 'm asking for any more. What became of you, Miss Perdita? I woke up once and you were n't there."

"Oh, I — I felt restless, and wandered about the island," said Perdita faintly.

She was lying wrapped up near me, and I turned to her. "Did you hear a cry? Did my spirit call to yours, darling?" I whispered.

"It must," she said. "The stars showed me you

lying white and cold on the strand." She shuddered. "I thought you were dead."

"There 's one thing," remarked Miss Harvey in her most authoritative way. "This rescue is all right for us. But where is poor Sir Gilbert?"

Yes, we had come back to that problem. What had become of Sir Gilbert?

CHAPTER XVII

THE HAVANA CIGAR

THE sun well in the heaven was burning brightly when I awoke the next morning. I still ached in all my body, but there was an eager day's work before me, and I could not afford to lie abed. To myself I seemed a stranger upon earth, newborn into a new sweet life. From death I had floated into Paradise, into a life of abundant sunshine and richness and grace. I was not likely to stay my flights of thought, consequent upon the night, but what I set down here has nothing to do with those: the record of this strange story demands my attention.

Between my rising and lunch I was in the village making inquiries. No trace of Norroy was there to be found. I went as far as the Point, and still heard nothing. At lunch Peter Toosey and I talked it all over. His curious agile mind had undoubtedly found a feasible solution. The boat we had seen while picnicking might have made a landing in our rear; and the only possible explanation of Norroy's disappearance lay in the hypothesis that he had been kidnapped by it. But why?

I turned this problem over in my mind carefully, persistently, anxiously. There could be no doubt that only one group of persons could have directed this blow. The trouble was to find an explanation for their con-

duct. They had served their writ on Norroy, which had, as I understood it, the object of forcing him into bankruptcy and acquiring his estate. If so, they would evidently not desire that he should be able to discharge the debt for which they had instigated proceedings. Was it possible that they had taken alarm at his relations with Miss Harvey, a notable heiress? It was impossible to guess. But one thing was certain — that to solve the secret we must watch Mr. Horne and his friends and accomplices.

I felt certain that I should hear from Miss Harvey, and in the early afternoon I had my faith substantiated. She came over with her mother, alive with anxiety and activity. Mrs. Harvey exhibited more distress than I should have deemed the circumstances warranted. She had once indicated to me her poor opinion of Sir Gilbert; but he had now risen to the height of a victim, even of a hero. What were we going to do? She suggested cabling to Pinkerton's in New York, being evidently distrustful of our English detectives. But I told her that I did not think the time had come for that resource, at which her daughter was clearly relieved. For some reason or other I gathered that Christobel had confidence in me. I said that inquiries had already been set on foot, and that, if we learned nothing from them, we should take other steps. It was Toosey, not I, who suggested, in defiance of his previous statement, that Sir Gilbert had possibly bolted to France to escape the process of law. He threw out brilliant suggestions as an anvil throws out sparks, but, in the light of what happened later, I will not venture to depreciate his ingenuity. Let it suffice to say that his suggestion was scornfully rejected.

The next day I heard from my friend in London regarding a query which I had forgotten. He had found no difficulty in identifying Mr. Naylor, having the memory of a man whose meteoric career in the city he had come across a few years earlier. Naylor, he said, if this were the man, was a financier of plausible address and of some good fortune, who had, however, of late, narrowly escaped the bankruptcy court and a prosecution. It was interesting, but hardly shed any light on our trouble.

Yet upon Naylor I felt that my attention must centre. If any one was the key to the situation it was he. Early that same afternoon the Harveys arrived again, and as I reached the gate I met them entering the park with Miss Fuller and my Perdita. I had gone down to the village to invite them to tea, and had demurely, and with the utmost propriety and even rigidity of conduct, conducted them to the Castle. Perdita was more charming than ever, struck with light and life and color, and a new sweetness that emerged from within her secret self.

It was no time for delightful dalliance; the stern duties of inquisition were laid on us. No news of Norroy had come to hand, and I had begun to grow anxious myself. The village was seething with the "sensation," in its rustic way, and it certainly looked like developing into a "job for the detectives." We discussed the disappearance together from all aspects, but were able to arrive no farther than we had already done. Only one thing of importance I had discovered, and that was the handsome face of Mr. Naylor in the village. He had taken a room for the night at the "Feathers" and had ordered dinner at seven-thirty.

as I learned from the landlord; having learned so much I had left resolved to return in time for that dinner. I was able, therefore, to give the council some consolation in a picked-up clue. More, I did not reveal at the time, being unwilling to raise their hopes too high. The discussion ceased of its own inertia at last, and Mr. Toosey took up a book from a side table. I noticed it was Bacon's "Novum Organum," just as my attention was called off by Mrs. Harvey.

"I say," said Toosey, breaking in suddenly on us, "is this authentic or is it a fake?"

I looked over at him, and saw he had the title-page open with the devices which I have mentioned.

"Oh, it's genuine," said I. "Its date is seventeen something."

He studied it for some minutes, then plumped it on the table excitedly.

"It's a cipher!" he pronounced.

And at that it all came out, and I had to tell the story of the secret passage, and of my vain exploration. Upon the top of this, of course, I must needs conduct the party to the gallery, and open the panel; and candles were employed to investigate the stairway. I believe Mrs. Harvey was of the opinion that we should find Norroy hidden there. I had managed to create an air of confidence, but in reality I was far from feeling it myself. I certainly had no desperate fears for Norroy, but the situation puzzled, even dismayed me. The inherent vitality of her temperament enabled Miss Harvey to become absorbed in the new pastime of hunt the cipher. In company with Toosey she examined all the staircases that could be found in the castle, and, wearied of a profitless task, I left them to the amuse-

ment and went back to the other guests. I had my reward when we had wandered out on to the lawn, and the ever blessed Miss Fuller led Mrs. Harvey away to see some prettiness in the garden.

"Let us lose them, Perdita," I implored.

She gave me her sweet shy smile and said nothing. It was an answer in itself.

"Let me hear your voice all to myself," I said, taking her hand. "I have heard it babbling chatter with the world. Now let your lover hear it for himself."

Her look, still shy and embarrassed, pleaded with me. I had yet to realize that it is not always high tide in a girl's heart; her passion ran low; she watched me with sweet diffident eyes, and half ashamed. She was troubled, and had not the magnificent confidence of her full pulse of love. Yet under my gaze and the clamor of my heart, hers began to expand. I saw the deep and inner founts of affection stir and gush and tremble in the pools of her eyes.

Mrs. Harvey came back. . . . I had never put a question to my love, but I cared not. There was no need of question and answer between us. An instinct united us. . . . Mrs. Harvey came back, and declared that she must go. And so we went in, and found Mr. Toosey and Christobel poring over the book and arguing. I was tired of the cipher, but grateful to it. I saw them go, and kissed my hand to the car.

My trail began between eight and nine that evening. I picked it up at the inn as I had hoped to do. And it was the beginning of the remarkable events which I have now to set forth.

Elegant with almond finger-nails, and the white crescent showing large at the base, a cigar of perfect

fragrance, and his languid feminine eyes, Mr. Naylor passed the entrance to the bar parlor of the "Feathers" and entered his private sitting-room at seven-thirty. I liked it better that he was alone; for if Horne had been with him, I should have had misgivings at such an open association. But Naylor had the room to himself and dined leisurely, down to his liqueur, which the innkeeper had succeeded in producing from the dust of his back shelves. As for me, I sat and chatted generously with every chance comer and, incidentally, drank more spirit than I had a fancy for. But I was determined to stand above suspicion and to be there merely on pleasure. And thus I had my reward.

It was after half-past eight when Naylor moved. What did so urban a man in this outlandish place? I asked myself. My host thought the gentleman was staying overnight only, and was going on to Plymouth on the morrow. He had been down before, he said, and fancied the place; so broke his journey on the way. It was a lame tale for a conspirator, and yet the disturbing part of it was that it might be exactly true. He might very well have come for a walk along the coast line in that fine summer weather. Travellers take a liking to some village met in their itineraries, and come and come again. But I knew it was not true. Was Mr. Naylor going forth that night to walk coastwise? I knew him better. If he went to take the air so would I. It was dusk when he started.

I had no difficulty in keeping him in view, for he had no suspicion that he was followed, and the evening was quite light. He went right through the village, stick in hand, and sauntered down into the lane that ran near the estuary towards the Point. It was darkening when

we reached the Point; seaward the sky was broken into masses of clouds and some fine openings of gray light. The houses of the fishermen were in deep shadow and being fast involved in the night. Now I was interested in the Point. Its population, which was scanty, seemed of a ruder, bluffer character than the people of the more civilized Southington, and doubtless had the qualities of their defects. Moreover the inquiries I had set on foot had failed to trace any boat out of Southington which could account for our strange visitors at the island. There were several places from which a sailing boat might have reached the estuary, but the Point was that which offered itself as the likeliest next after our village. And yet no information of any boat could be obtained there. But in a hamlet which was devoted to fishing and fishermen, it was not altogether impossible that the destination of one small craft might escape notice. Concealed in the darkness of the houses I watched Naylor. His actions were by no means suspicious. He passed the huddle of cottages, and went out to the rocks which formed the extremity of the hamlet, and, after remaining there for a few minutes in apparent admiration of the night scene, he retraced his path and moved westwards along the foreshore, ultimately turning the bluff which bounded the village. When I reached this he was some hundred yards away, strolling along the beach, stick in hand, and leaving the odor of his excellent Havana behind him.

I followed warily, and at varying intervals so we continued — past the cliffs and the caves, past the limits of the Castle grounds, along the arc of the shore for a mile or more. The beach here was rough with boulders and the tide was well out; it was a pleasant

night, and I almost despaired of finding that we had come out for more than a constitutional by the wonderful sea. We had got more than half-way across the north bight that curves in between the Point and the next promontory, when suddenly my quarry vanished. I had kept close enough to hold him in observation all the time, but he suddenly disappeared. I hastened forward to catch him up, but as that did not bring his figure out of the darkness, I dropped again into a dignified pace and continued my way a little on the sea side of the boulder.

I think I should have given up the chase altogether and returned in chagrin to the Castle but for my nose. I have a strong sense of smell, and now through the acrid salt savor of the seaweed and all sea things, there drifted to my nostrils the scent of a cigar. I did not pause, but went on, yet turned my head and looked upwards towards the rocks that were here a serried phalanx on the margin of the high-water mark. It seemed to me that I could make out dimly a figure seated among them. I should not have suspected it for a human being, had it not been for that fragrance on the air. And yet, if it was Naylor, of what could I suspect him? I walked on some three hundred yards farther until I was swallowed up in the night, and then, taking a leaf out of his book, I found a seat among the rocks myself.

I waited ten minutes, but there was no sign — a quarter of an hour, and then I descried a figure moving below down on the beach. I got up cautiously, and strode off towards it, keeping it only as an undefined shape that melted into and out of the darkness. I pursued these tactics until at last I plainly saw it

diagonally cross the boulders and make for the cliff. I followed, and presently I discovered that I was ascending an easy gradient of the cliff side.

On the top some lights were visible in cottages, and between them and me was my dark figure. It paused for a moment outside one of the houses, and (as I was much closer now) when the door opened, the light from within flashed on the man's face. To my utter chagrin it was not Naylor. The door shut, and I had hardly the spirit to approach and examine the house. But I did so, and thought I could make out a faint illegible sign-board above the door. Apparently it was a roadside inn; and before me stretched a winding road which moved eastward somewhere, I took it, in the direction of the estuary.

There was nothing for it now but to go back, and I did so with bitter disappointment. I had lost my man, and apparently he had been bent on nothing more offensive than a nocturnal ramble by the sea. I strode back along the shore at a faster rate, resolved to give up my quest for the night at any rate and wondering why I had thought myself a smart detective. In the midst of these thoughts I came face to face with Naylor, and apologized almost before I had recognized him by the cock of his hat. He answered civilly, and continued on his way, as I on mine. But the encounter led me into a new train of ideas. Why was a shady financial agent anxious to spend an hour in commune with his own soul by the sea, remote from human habitation? It did not strike me as in keeping, unless he were contemplating suicide.

Yet after my former failure I dared not turn and follow. He had already merged in the night. I stood and considered. In a flash I had an inspiration. The

man's face at the window had been vaguely familiar to me; now I recalled it. He was the tall dark fisherman I had seen once in conversation with Horne on the sea-front. But what of that, you say? Nothing, save that I harbored a brood of suspicions. If Naylor suspected that he was followed, he had effectively dodged me by his ruse. What if he had been on his way to keep an appointment with the fisherman? What fisherman would go for his evening glass to an inn so inaccessible, when there was Southington so handy? Through Horne the connection was easily obtained. I paused, I wondered, I doubted, and I turned. After all my failure could not be more complete than it had been.

But I was in no mood to risk discovery this time. If Naylor were on his way to a meeting he would arrive at the inn eventually. Knowing, then, his presumed destination, I was not at the necessity of tracking him. I could go direct to the tavern myself. I struck over the rocks towards the cliffs, which fortunately here descended very low, and I was soon at the top. Thereafter I made off across the fields in the direction of the cottages, which I reached after some blundering in the darkness.

The inn door was shut, but there was still a light in the window. If Naylor had been going there he must have arrived before me. I went round to the back of the house, but all the blinds were drawn. I managed to see the time by the light from a window, and found it was just ten. At ten I knew all licensed houses close and the guests must turn out. I should, therefore, have only a few minutes to wait in order to solve my problem.

I waited until the inn disgorged, and stood in the shadows to observe the men as they came out. The

dark fisherman was not one of them. I had been a fool, then, for all my pains, and I had only a dreary and empty tramp back before me. As I was turning away, a shadow on the blind arrested me. It was the figure of a man, but there was nothing in that, nothing save that it stooped over the lamp obscuring it for a moment, as if he had bent to light his pipe. And then there travelled slowly to my nostrils the remembered fragrance of a fine Havana cigar!

I thrilled. Naylor was here then, and I had been right after all. Of course he could stay as long as he liked after licensed hours by the simple expedient of hiring a bedroom. If he had done that, it showed me clearer than ever that I was on the right tack. If he had hired a room to discourse with a confederate — !

I waited quite three quarters of an hour, and then the door opened, emitting no other than Naylor. There was exchange of talk between him and a man within, and I gathered that he had engaged a trap to drive him. If so I had lost him again. But there still remained the dark fisherman; of that I was now sure.

From my hiding-place I watched Naylor drive off along the road to the estuary and soon afterwards the other man emerged. He did not hesitate, but struck off down the cliff to the beach, and I was on his trail like a hound upon the fox's. I would not lose him at any rate.

No doubt, if they ever had supposed they were followed, they had been deluded by my return into a false security. And so the fisherman stalked through the night carelessly and without any concern for spies. We walked by the low water where the sand was hard and wet, and the night winds blew in our faces briskly,

and we crossed the bight again to the neighborhood of the cliff and the cavern. Just here the man took a slanting path upwards to the rocks, and began to cross them to the door of the cave. I succeeded in still retaining my view of him, until, finally, he vanished at the mouth of the cavern. I approached nearer, and waited and listened; and then a light flashed up and moved in the air; then that disappeared. I went forward stealthily till I had reached the entrance, and peered in. I advanced into the outer cavern and looked through into the inner; a faint light, the reflection as it were of a glow, a diffusion of luminosity in the interior air was appreciated by my eyes newly out of the blindness of the night. Somewhere within was the man with his lantern. My legs came to a standstill, but mentally I went on with a huge impetuous rush. I had made a discovery. The caves assumed new light, new proportions. I began to see that the solution lay here. But what was it? And in what manner was Norroy involved in it? The glow died out and left pitch darkness. I deliberated long as I turned back. The caves demanded exploration.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SECRET OF THE CAVES

I ROSE on the following morning with my mind full of my project, and at one time I thought of inviting Toosey's assistance. But the time was hardly ripe for that. I must make a preliminary reconnoitre first. This I succeeded in doing before midday.

I descended on the foreshore by the wicket gate in the Castle grounds, and was soon on the beach among the rocks. The tide was out once more, and the cave easy of access. I had furnished myself with a hurricane lamp and a generous store of matches; and I entered the outer shell, the ear of the cavern, as it were, in which all the sounds of the external world drummed and echoed, with sensible excitement and expectation. Having lighted my lamp I turned into the interior cavity, and pushed on to the bottom of that. Here a passage in the rocky way gave entrance to a third chamber, an ample and lofty vault, dripping to the eye and dank to the nostril. Out of this again a defile led into still further caverns, and I was on the point of passing through this when I noticed another opening a little to my left. I swung the lamp on it, and discovered that it also led off, but in another direction. I went through the first opening, and found at the base of this fourth cavern a gallery leading on apparently indefinitely. I came back and tried the second opening, and here again I made acquaintance with a gallery.

What is more, I counted three openings out of it in the space of twelve yards. Once more I retraced my way and returned to the first gallery. The same phenomenon was here repeated. Numerous openings in the solid rock testified to the ramifications of the passages. The whole place was evidently burrowed like a rabbit warren. I felt that I needed better assistance than my memory if I was to attempt to solve the secret of this subterranean hold; and so reluctantly I resought the light of day.

It was now quite clear to what use these caverns had been put in older days. They had formed the hold of the Freetraders, and their ramifications had, doubtless, been of service to them in their continuous war with the revenue authorities. The place was a nexus of passages, perhaps intercommunicating, and possibly leading to a central warehouse, which would thus defy the unravelling of any one save the initiated. I judged that this subterranean cellarage was mainly natural, but probably connections had been also artificially made. Certainly, I must consider further before I became involved in that honeycomb.

By the time I reached the Castle again, it was nearly one o'clock, and I lunched hastily in order to get down into Southington in good time. I had only just finished when Mr. Toosey appeared. He had been sent for by the Harveys, and had been over to their hotel in reference to the disappearance of Norroy. I now learned that Mrs. Harvey was increasingly anxious to engage the services of a detective, and I wrote out a lengthy telegram for despatch to her to prevent this. "I may have important news by to-morrow. If not, then authorize professional help," I wired to her.

I said nothing of what I expected, or of how I expected it; for, to say the truth, I took a little human satisfaction in the mystery of my clue. Not even to Toosey did I mention details, but I gave him a mission which pleased him. I suggested that he should paint out-of-doors, and at the Point, moreover; and I gave him a description of the man I wanted him to observe. He took to the work as a duck to water, and gave me an elaborate explanation of his plans for avoiding curiosity. He would choose his subject carefully, prospecting every foot of the hamlet, and he would prove a fool, he thought, if he did not ultimately fetch up in front of this particular fisherman's cottage. That accomplished, Toosey's eagle eye would be on the sinister man.

I did not doubt his capacity to put so easy a plan into execution; as an artist no one would question his bona fides. And it would serve me to have the confederate under supervision all the afternoon. For, you see, I had realized that it was impracticable to make my second essay at exploration until the tide served again — which would not be till near dark. Until after eight I was perforce idle. And, lacking the opportunity to be useful, I took the opportunity to be happy. In other words, I spent a couple of hours at Southington. Of course, I had a good excuse in reporting progress, if I wanted one; but I did not. I entered Mrs. Lane's as a right, and, the discreet Isabel being absent, I held out my arms. Perdita shook her head, smiling.

"We live in the daylight," she remonstrated, when I paid no heed to this.

"Light or dark, rain or shine, sun or snow, I care not," I said defiantly. "All the world is one to me, and

all weathers are the same, provided I have Perdita. All tragedies are comedies, and there is no space nor time, while I have Perdita. There is only just so much space as is spanned by Perdita, and only just so much time to kiss her. The only time that time gallops is when I do that. Otherwise it stands still."

"You speak," said Perdita, rosy warm, "as if you had often done it. You have only done it once — twice."

"One hundred million times in my heart," I said, "and since it is only twice in sad fact, why I must make a beginning in earnest."

Perdita retreated almost to the door of that room into which she had once thrust me, her own sweet personal chamber, wherein she was wont to dream sweet dreams and live her girlish fancies.

"You want to see Isabel?" she said. "I will call her."

"If you call Isabel," I retorted, "I will box her ears. I will take her and push her out of the room. I will use awful language such as she will scream and rush from. And I know awful words!"

Perdita had her back to the door of her room, and she laughed, her hand behind her on the handle to prevent surprises.

"It 's time I was getting on with my shopping," she said demurely. "It 's my turn to shop to-day."

"Thank goodness, I know what it is to be a man," I said heartily, "and to abound and rejoice in physical strength. Let me warn you, beloved, that no girl is a match for a brutal man with arms like brawn and a determination like iron. No one shall go forth from this room except at my pleasure."

Perdita slipped into her own room and closed the door. I was alone.

I cried, I pleaded, I begged, I humbled myself — and she was adamant. Then I told her through the keyhole my opinion of women, their fickleness, their deceit, their treachery, and their vanity.

"You have only gone to beautify yourself more," I said sarcastically. "But you can't, you know you can't. That 's the joke. Oh, my Perdita is my vain thing; she thinks to gild the lily and to paint the rose."

Perdita was offended at this. "I have never used a cosmetic in my life," she said primly when she had returned, pretending that she had not run from me and had not heard me, and that she really wondered to find me there.

"I thought it was time you went," she said austerely. "Isabel is out just now."

Oh, I won't recall the word I used in connection with Isabel, but Perdita was not really shocked. She said she was, but it has always been my secret belief that Perdita was sometimes a humbug. Yet when Isabel did come, she brought me news that Mr. Toosey was looking for me in the village. He had been to the Castle and not found me. Now, how on earth did he know that I was at Mrs. Lane's?

Mr. Toosey's report brought me back to dull earth. He had identified the man I had described, had succeeded in choosing his cottage as a "pitch," and had kept him under observation until the man had put to sea after his midday meal. So far good; if he had gone I should be the safer from surveillance in my expedition. I went back to Mrs. Lane's, but the ladies were

dressing to go out, and I got no consideration whatsoever from Perdita. I was not to attend them I was told; they were on purely private affairs connected with the house. She challenged me with her glances, and I insisted on accompanying them, which I successfully accomplished without further protest.

I liked shopping with Perdita; there was something indefinably intimate in it, for presently Miss Fuller discovered business at a cottage on the hill, and imposed the task upon us. I watched Perdita while she bought soap and candles and sugar, and offered her advice on sundry household purchases. But unhappily she did not seem to have much opinion of my opinion; she steadily ignored it.

"We 'll change all that, my lady, when you 're my wife," I whispered threateningly in her ear. It grew pink like the petal of a pink rose, and she hurriedly talked to the shopwoman.

"And may I have a bar of tea, please," said silly Perdita. Then, her confusion worse confounded, she grew redder, and, when we had got outside safely, declared she was going home. Alas, it was time for me also to go home to make my preparations.

"Perdita!" said I, solemnly, when we paused to part, "I have suddenly remembered something. I 've never formally asked for your hand. When may I come and do it? It 's rather important." She only looked; she did not answer. I don't somehow think she could answer just then.

"And you 've never called me anything," I went on. "Never, never anything. Now I must be called something."

"I — I don't know what to call you," stammered

Perdita. And the dear heart, I had not reflected, did not, of course, know I was Richard. I told her.

"Never mind," I added. "That will keep until I have formally asked for your hand, which I propose to do — let me see — to-morrow. Heavens, how terrible a sweetness there is in living in suspense! But as you must call me something, and must n't call me Dick yet, suppose you call me dearest."

"Oh!" protested Perdita, aflame.

"Very well, beloved," said I, "I am going hence, and Heaven only knows when you will see me again. I am going on a desperate venture." My Perdita opened her eyes largely. "I 'm plunging into unknown risks and hazards." Perdita's face fell.

"What — what are you going to do?" she asked anxiously. I loved to see that anxiety resident there — for me.

"I 'm going to follow up a clue," I said; and so I told her, and she was the only one who knew.

Perdita blanched. "But what — what — " she paused. "Oh, is n't there danger?" she asked.

I shook my head. I was charged with confidence then, and would not have called the king my cousin. Before me Fate spread her lures in vain. From my height I looked down upon a less fortunate world; and no intervention could bar my way to happiness.

"But what do you expect to find there?" said Perdita, with awe in her voice.

"I shall find the secret which has been puzzling us," I said confidently. "If it is anywhere, it is there. I am not afraid for Norroy. There 's nothing tragic about it all, but only something dishonest. Those caves, my dear, were used for contraband a hundred

years ago; I believe they are used for contraband to-day, but *mutatis mutandis*. That 's all. And you and I shall speed like fairy princess and prince to release the hapless victim."

"Do you think he can be there?" she asked breathlessly.

"I think I shall know about it when *I* have been there," I answered.

She drew a deep breath, and contemplated me with triumphing ardor. I think, though she said nothing but with those eyes, she was glad that her lover was so brave and noble. Ah, dear heart, I have never done anything brave or noble in my frivolous life, but now I know I could face death and torture and eternal ruin for the sake of one woman. I was proud to seem a hero in those pretty eyes, though I was half ashamed at the false pretences. I was only visiting an interesting cavern. We step out upon our most fateful journeys unawares; we turn the corners light-heartedly to tragedy.

Perdita laid a hand upon my arm, pleading with me with that instinct magic of understanding that had come to pass between us. "You must not run into danger. You must not come to harm, . . . dearest," she said in a low tense voice.

If it had not been the road I would have caught her up in my arms. But I could only control myself and speak through my gaze, which devoured that vision of loveliness. There was some strange chord that bound us; words could say no more between us just then. I turned and left her, and, looking back at the corner of the square, I saw her looking back also.

I nearly rushed into the arms of Miss Fuller, as she came up the street, laden with parcels.

Radiantly, I was going by with a significant smile for her, when she stopped as if to address me, and some of her packages were scattered on the road. I stooped to pick them up, mysterious long "drapery" things, some mustard that had broken its bonds, and pepper that set Miss Fuller sneezing.

"Atchew!" she sneezed, and another package fell. It was a bulky envelope for which she had evidently called at the post-office, and the flimsy paper had frayed and broken, so that part of its contents slipped out in the dust. I gathered them up while Isabel continued her sneezing, and as I did so I could not but see the inscription on the packet and the contents. It was addressed to Miss Fuller at Mrs. Lane's, bore a London postmark, and it held, apparently, several letters addressed to Miss Rivers. I stacked them all carefully in Isabel's arms and dismissed her with my blessing.

"Go back, dear lady," I said, "and tell the most beautiful woman you chance to see that you met one walking with his head in air, and that he upset all your parcels thereby, and spilt the pepper in the gutter; and say that if he were walking to perdition he would still walk with his head in air and perish happily ever afterwards."

"It 's nonsense, you know," said Isabel, laughing nervously and pleasantly, "but I know what you mean. I 'm so glad."

All the world was glad. I strolled up the deep-sunk lane to the Castle the gladdest of all, listening to the birds. It was already that hour in late afternoon when they are contemplating the evening concert. Ah! I sighed to think that no nightingale ever poured out his passionate full heart in Devon. Other birds may make

musical the countryside, but never sad Philomel. The blackbird sang with rich melody, the thrush scattered his song with reckless largess, the wren was like fireworks in the hedge, and the voice of the unseen willow-warbler drifted out of the trees like a plaintive ghost that sings as it fades away. But no nightingale sang to any rose by Devon lanes and Devon gardens. No; in Devon the nightingale's song is in the lover's heart.

Mr. Toosey had embarrassed Mrs. Jackman during my absence by his researches in the Castle; he had politely insisted on exploring the precincts of the kitchen for a solution of the hypothetical cipher in the "Novum Organum"; and to Mrs. Jackman's obvious distress he had imagined he had discovered it in her bedroom. I had dinner with him, and, if he had not been so crack-brained and volatile of mind, I should have invited him to join me on my adventure. It was just a toss-up, as the saying is, that I did not. On so little does so much depend. I left the Castle towards dark alone, but armed with several adjuncts.

The tide was running well out, and when I gained the beach in front of the cave not a soul was in sight. Only far out a single sail moved like a dot on the great channel. I lit my lamp in the first cave, proceeded through the second into the third without hesitation; and then my new experiment opened. I had brought with me several balls of strong thin twine, and the end of one of these I made fast to a projecting point of rock; then with the hurricane lamp throwing a light before me I plunged cheerfully down one of the corridors to which I have referred in a previous chapter.

I had selected the passage at random, for there was nothing to guide me in my choice; and now I must

pick one of the channels that led off it by the same guesswork. The first I entered in a very short time proved a blind alley, and I retraced my way to make trial of another. This conducted me for some distance and then branched into two, one of which I was obliged to take in preference to the other. Again, I had the same alternative forced upon me; and then half a dozen openings were offered to me. At least four or five times I chose at haphazard, ever trailing my thread behind me through the darkness, until I fancied I had penetrated at least one hundred and fifty yards in these intestine alleys. That was so far as distance was concerned, for I had not been able to keep count of direction, and I had not a guess where I was in relation to the sea. Immediately, upon that, I arrived in a cave of large area, which I was only able to illumine faintly with my lantern.

I threw up the light to the vault above, which was some fifteen feet high, and, travelling slowly round the walls of the cavern, I reckoned its diameter at something like thirty feet. I made a careful examination of this chamber, and in one place found some old decaying casks, and other débris, which suggested that the vault had been used in other days as a storage cellar by the smugglers. This seemed to indicate that there was a nearer passage between it and the sea; for I could not believe that those erratic and tedious ramifications had been utilized for the difficult transport of goods. And this indication was endorsed by the number of holes which led out of the vault. Indeed, so numerous were they, that it is not exaggerating to say that the walls were riddled with holes. Avenues seemed to converge on that central warehouse from all quarters,

though whether they intercommunicated and flowed subsequently in one ampler channel I could not say.

So far my quest had met with no reward, save the relics of an interesting history. But after all, my concern was in no way with the dead freebooters of a past civilization. And when I looked at those burrows my heart misgave me. I was standing in the arena in consideration, when my eye was caught by a mark on the floor. This was of sand, dry and dusty, and evidently a superficial carpet to the deeper rock. The marks that arrested me were uniform lines ploughed two inches deep, and extending across the cavern. I put my lantern to the ground and traced them. They went right through the chamber and disappeared into a burrow. I came back, tracked them in the other direction and saw them slip into a burrow on the other side. The vault then was intermediate in a road of traffic which led from somewhere beyond to what must be the entrance to the whole nest of subterranean galleries. The marks seemed to me to have been sunk by a wheel.

I was bent over them, lost in thought, when there came to my ears a rumbling sound, a hollow echo as of a human voice. Instinctively, I put out the lantern and crept towards the sheltering darkness of the walls. It was as well I did so, for out of a burrow on one side a spreading light emerged, flinging strange shadows the length of the vault; and, presently, I made out the figure of a man from which the light swung. It was short and crabbed, bow-legged and squat, but of astonishing breadth; it walked like a beetle, the lantern creaking as it went, and throwing grotesques upon the walls and on the floor. Slowly it passed across and

disappeared into one of the holes, and the light died away.

Stealthily I relit my own lantern and followed the direction of this curious creature to its point of disappearance. Then I came back. I was not sure what I ought to do. Should I pursue the beetle and see what the pursuit brought? Or should I proceed with the investigation I had already begun into the wheel-marks? A vague thought that these galleries might be the home of a gang of coiners, or even of illicit distillers, flashed through my mind. Whoever they were, it was my bounden duty to follow up my discoveries. I retraced the wheel-marks, and to my surprise and satisfaction, I found that they came out of the opening from which the dwarf had entered. I immediately made my decision. I would explore that way.

I had no difficulty now in guiding myself by these signs of human handiwork. My lantern showed them to me plainly on the sandy floor; and I passed several openings without pausing to regard or consider them. Finally, I struck into another cave, but one of smaller size than the vault I had left, and here I came to an abrupt stop. For right in the centre of my path was a pickaxe lying on a heap of stones.

I drew nearer, bent over it and scrutinized it carefully. The stones were of different sizes, some being jagged pieces of rock. My mind was bewildered but eager; and my gaze wandering farther round lighted now upon a wheelbarrow. Here was evidently the explanation of the marks I had been following. I stared farther still, and the light threw up dimly a second heap of stones. What was it? I stooped again, and picked up one in my hand; it weighed like lead. I am no geolo-

gist and no man of science. Least of all am I a metallurgist. Yet to me that stone spoke somehow of metal. I put it up right into the eye of the light, which gleamed on a clean exposed face. I uttered an exclamation. The secret was out. I held in my hand a lump of exceedingly rich copper ore.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LABYRINTH

WITH the key in my hand the whole of the mystery was easy to unlock. I saw now the course of this deep conspiracy and, behold, it was very simple. Facts and events fell into their place appositely, when once I realized for what these scoundrels had been playing. The discovery of the copper lead in the subterranean passages was the initial event, and it was a short step thence to the plot, which was designed to obtain possession of the mine surreptitiously. For this purpose it was necessary that the owner of the estate under which the treasure lay should be kept in ignorance. An attempt, therefore, had been made by Naylor to purchase the Castle property, but this had been foiled by Norroy's dogged tenacity in the face of adversity. After this failure more diplomatic and less comfortable means were employed. The young baronet had lived beyond his income and was known to be in difficulties; it was easy to buy up debts, of which his genuine creditors must have begun to despair. And so Mr. Horne is in possession of the requisite lever and proceeds to apply it. This covert mean-looking little commission agent was "in the deal" with the aristocratic financier with a shady record. If this pretty pair can force Sir Gilbert Norroy into the bankruptcy court the Castle is theirs for an upshot price — and with the Castle,

this precious copper mine. Oh, I saw it all now, and saw it clearly. Naylor and Horne, and their creatures, had stacked the cards carefully and patiently and cunningly; but they had not yet played out the game. I reckoned that I held some trumps now in my own hand.

But where did Norroy's disappearance come in? And what part had that factor in the game? I began to see the sort of men we were fighting, and to have a vast respect at once for their intelligence and their audacity. The writ had been successfully served on Norroy, with the prospect of his ultimate bankruptcy. But stay; there was a contingency to be faced. What if he should succeed in meeting his creditors and settling his debts? I could conceive the infinite dismay with which Messrs. Naylor and Horne would contemplate the possibility. And the fact is, as I had already acknowledged to myself, that that possibility was advancing even into a likelihood. What otherwise was the significance of the growing intimacy of Miss Harvey and Norroy? Rogues who devised so cunning an intrigue, and had so daringly contrived the service of the writ, were not likely to remain in ignorance either of the condition of the Harveys or of the probable course of events. It was not too much to assume that they had taken fright at the chance, and delivered a stroke with their characteristic effrontery. If so, Norroy was a prisoner, and would remain a prisoner, if they could hold him, until his financial affairs had got beyond salvation. I did not doubt in the least that they had captured him; what did give me food for consideration was the wonder if they had chosen these vaults as his cell or had gone somewhere else for their prison.

I made a careful examination of the vault, and found that the walls were rich in copper ore. A certain amount of work had been carried on here, and there were several hundred-weights of stone broken out at different intervals; but I judged that no systematic attempt had yet been made to work the lead. That would wait until the rogues were in possession of the property, all signed and sealed. Then, there was in the background, probably, an eventual flotation and plunder enough to enrich these gutter financiers a dozen times over. It had been a game well worth playing, and I rejoiced that I had come in with a big trump.

There were several openings off this cavern also, and I bent to look in the sand for signs of any traffic by them. I found two only with marks of feet, and one of them I explored until I reached a small cave occupied by some boxes and a barrel, a rude mattress and coverings, and a chair. Evidently this was tenanted by some one, at any rate occasionally, and it served as a storehouse. A glance at the boxes showed me that it served as a larder also. So far good. It brought nearer the likelihood that Norroy was confined in the caves.

I had now wellnigh come to the end of my balls of string, which I had from time to time connected, and I feared that, if the galleries ran much farther, I should be forced to abandon my plan of following them up. I retraced my way back to the ore cavern, and tried the second opening. The corridor from this led by a long narrow way up against solid rock. It was a cul-de-sac.

Nothing was to be gained apparently on this side; and so I made up my mind to return to the central warehouse and trace the beetle's footsteps on the lower side. But I had hardly gone twenty feet or so backward on my

string, when I heard a shout echoing through the grim and silent tombs. I stopped. It rose again like the hollow voice of a dead man, reverberating from the rock and booming unearthly in the charnel atmosphere of the galleries. It was hard to guess at whence it came, but judging it to arise from the right hand I turned into a doorway that opened there, and let out more twine. I moved as quietly as I could through this broken passage, and emerged in a cross-way. Again the shout sounded, and it was now certainly louder, and more cavernous. I turned out of this gallery and my lantern gleamed on the walls of a narrow chamber.

"Plutus, or Charon, damn you!"

It was unmistakable. It was Norroy's voice. Eagerly I called his name.

"Good God, who is it? Brabazon, what?" he cried back in his familiar manner.

The voice came from near by, and I swung the light in its direction. It illumined a patch of the cell, where Norroy was lying on a pallet, his legs bound together by rope, and his hands similarly treated. He was propped up against the wall, and by his side I took in at a glance a pint pot and a metal plate.

"I say, old man," said Norroy, "how the devil did you get here?" He paused a moment, and then added weakly, "This is a bit thick, is n't it, what?"

I bent over him, put the lantern on the floor, and extracting a knife from my pocket cut the ropes which bound him.

"Thank goodness, you 've had no longer of it," I said heartily, and seized his enfeebled hand affectionately.

"It 's been long enough," said he. "I thought you were old Plutus. I call him that because this is Hell, you know."

I did not distinguish for him between Pluto and Plutus, and after all in a way the beetle might be considered a god of wealth in that hidden mine. I had no doubt he alluded to the butler.

"Is that a dwarfish creature with his head low on his shoulders?" I asked.

He nodded. "He 's my gaoler. I wanted a drink. I say, is there anything in that pot, old chap?"

I handed him the pint pot, and he took a long draught. Then I gave him a sip from the flask I carried. "I say, what 's the time? Is it night or day? How long have I been here? It 's about ten days, I think, since I heard my watch stop. I used to listen to the ticking in my pocket. It was the only sound I could hear."

Ten days! Lord, how the man must have suffered! It could only have been as I reckoned seventy-two hours. But there is no such thing as absolute time, and days are marked merely by the contents thereof. Time that is blank means nothing; a thousand years are but as yesterday, and yesterday as a thousand years. I shuddered. But I had something to learn from Norroy.

"Were you kidnapped?" I asked.

"Regularly shanghaied," said Sir Gilbert, with a return of his old cheerfulness. "They copped me on the hop, old man. I 'd no sooner got the blessed boat loose than I was tripped up on both sides and rolled over. Had n't a chance, what? If they 'd been sporting at all they would n't have shot me sitting. What the devil do they want, anyway? I can't pay ransom. Got no money."

I knew what they wanted, and I noted with interest that they had not told him.

"Who are they?" I inquired.

"A tall thin black buffer and old Plutus. What the Hades do they want? Plutus won't open his mouth, and grins when I ask him. Got a cigar or anything?"

I shook my head. "We must n't smoke till we get out of this," I said. "It would betray us. Tell me what are this dwarf's habits."

"Well, when he gets up," said Sir Gilbert, plaintively, "I don't know, as it 's always the middle of the night here. But he comes round with breakfast in the middle of the night; and by and by he comes round with dinner in the middle of the night. And then he gives me supper in the middle of the night. It 's pretty hard tack too, — damned ship's biscuits or something."

"Then is this your supper you 've had?" I asked.

"Yes, or breakfast, — I don't know which. All the same, you know. Is it night? Plutus has just gone and I thought your steps were his coming back. That 's why I holloaed out. I say, Brabazon, you did n't tell me how you got here."

"I 'll tell you that later," I said. "We must think of getting out now while the tide is low. Otherwise we shall be caught in here and run all kinds of risks. Do you think the dwarf sleeps here?"

He shook his head. "Don't know. Don't know any blessed thing except what I 've told you," he said mournfully. "I suppose I 'm somewhere under the earth."

"We 'll soon have you above it," said I, cheerfully. "Do you feel your legs all right?"

"A bit paralytic," confessed Sir Gilbert. "So would

you be. But I 'm on. I say, you are a good chap to hunt me up like this. How 's Miss Harvey?"

I reassured him of Miss Harvey's health, and he seemed pleased to think that she had been distressed by his disappearance. "Jolly good of her," he remarked, "awfully kind of her. By Jove, to think she was put out! Ripping of her, what?"

He never remembered to inquire about Miss Fuller or Perdita, but I forgave him. His spirits rose, till presently they were quite normal. "It 's the constant darkness that tries you most," he explained. "Lord, I did get sick of it. Old Plutus I used to hail as a dear friend. I say, Brabazon, I wonder if Hell will be like this. If so, I 'll take jolly good care to get to the other place. What have you got there?" he broke off, eying the string in my hand.

I told him, and his admiration knew no bounds. "That 's a cute trick," he said. "Fancy thinking of that. We 'll be out in a brace of shakes."

I hoped we should, for I conceived that the dwarf had completed his task for the night and had gone. The tide was by this time rolling in, and he would naturally be anxious to get away from the caves and not remain shut up in them all night. So I did not look for any encounter with him, or with the lean dark fisherman who was evidently his associate in this nefarious kidnapping. And so, with a comparatively light heart I led the way, lantern in hand, and winding up my string as I moved towards the mouth of the caves.

We had gone some half of the distance, as I estimated from the amount of the reclaimed string, when I noticed that the twine lay on the sand in loops, looser, that is, than I had imagined it would lie from the fall I had given

it on my entrance. I paid, however, small heed to this, giving it nothing beyond a vague wonder. And next it came into my mind to speculate as to whether this passage I had happened upon was that used by the dwarf and his confederates. I was still without any misgivings as to my power to reach the ultimate outer cavern, and had thus room and time to devote to some curiosity. I stopped and scrutinized the floor. But here the rock outcropped, and though I fancied I could discern the print of feet I was not sure. We continued, therefore, until I felt the ground under me soft with sand, when I made another examination. You see I thought my observations might come in useful in the subsequent operations on those galleries that I saw imminent.

I resumed, slowly, ever pulling the cord which lay on the ground; and soon I was aware that I must be approaching the mouth, for I had wound up almost the whole of my last ball of string, A little farther, I reckoned, I should get into the gallery leading to the second cave. I wound up, the ball increased, grew into a monstrous bunch, as you know string will under amateur hands, and suddenly and without warning, I pulled up the end, which dangled through my fingers loosely as I wound. I stopped paralyzed by fear.

I had reached the end of the twine, and this was a strange place! The end of the ball was not where I had left it — in the outside caves!

I was aghast at this discovery, so much so that I did not immediately grasp its meaning. When I did so my consternation was the greater. The end of the string I had fastened, as I have told you, on a projection of rock in the second cave. Human agency had removed

it thence. We had no longer a clue to guide us out of the subterranean passage!

"What 's the matter, old chap?" said poor Norroy, seeing me come to an abrupt halt.

It went to my heart to tell him. Yet it had to be done. He drew a finger ruefully down his long nose.

"I say," he said. "What a beastly nuisance! Who the deuce can have shifted it?"

I saw plainly now, and cursed myself for the stupendous folly which had prevented me from being alive to the danger earlier. As I had read the dwarf's footsteps, so could he read mine! They had betrayed me doubtless to his accustomed eyes, and he had taken the best means of disposing of the stranger. There was no need of violence, no necessity for angry words and furious encounters; this custodian of the inferno, as Norroy rightly considered him, found the means for my undoing ready to his hand, and supplied by myself. He had removed the thread of twine into the intricate maze of the labyrinth, and now we two hapless creatures stood there, somewhere deep in the bowels of the cliff side, with only a remote chance of beating our way out.

The blacker grew the prospect every minute that I considered it. It was true we had a lantern, but I did not know how long the oil would last; and if we had not succeeded in breaking out of the ravelled web before that happened, our case would be ten times more desperate. I will admit that I lost heart in that terrible moment. Can you call the picture up? — A hundred dark and narrow intercommunicating passages, a rabbit-warren of holes, an endless journey along blind alleys, and a man weakened and dispirited by solitary confinement for days and poor food? Did I say dis-

pirited? Sir Gilbert's voice issued thinly just then to give me the lie.

"I'll tell you what! If old Acheron has n't cleared out, let's get hold of him and screw his neck till he tells us how to get out."

It was a bright idea! He seemed pleased with it, and feebly stuck his eye-glass in his eye to see how I took it.

"An excellent idea," said I, judicially, "if we find him." This perhaps set him thinking, for he turned his mind aside from that happy thought and surveyed the hopeless corridor.

"It stands to reason," he pronounced, "that the entrance is n't this way since old Plutus would n't be fool enough to shift it nearabouts. I vote we turn and hark back."

The notion was as good as any that I could suggest, and I agreed. We might, in truth, as well toss a coin for it at every corner. We retraced our way to an opening.

"I'll tell you a good idea," said Norroy, presently. "We'll mark these places. I've got a pencil in my pocket; and we'll mark 'em. And then, if the route fails, we'll know we've tried it, see?"

I wondered how long it would take us to mark all the openings in the rock, but I did not dare to discourage him. He made a cross after some efforts on the dark stone, and marched cheerily on, repeating the same operation at the next turning.

"Don't they blaze trees somewhere or other to guide them?" he asked, as his mind caught at another brilliant notion. "Oh, I say, Brabazon, we 'll wear 'em down yet. You've only got to keep going, you know, what?"

Well, we kept going, until both of us were exhausted, and without the slightest result. Let me briefly rehearse the proceedings of that awful night.

Naturally I first thought of the foot-tracks, that unhappy medium of our ruin. Since the dwarf had shifted our clue he must have left imprints of his passage behind. These I discovered occasionally where the sand was loose underfoot, and it was these that we followed during our first attempt. Sir Gilbert was content to mark his crosses at the turnings we took on the chance that our essay would not prove successful. In this he was right. The dwarf's tracks led by impish devious ways, and once crossed the central vault which I have described. But when my hopes were raised to a high pitch by the hypothesis that he was now on his road to the entrance I lost them altogether on a rocky floor. I tried one way and then another, but all in vain; the footmarks had vanished. Nevertheless, I swore that I would exhaust all the possible permutations of the various directions, and, accordingly, I resolved to rest where we were and start again with renewed strength. Norroy's pencil had been eagerly busy as he ticked off the passages we had tested. He had never once lost hope, and even confidence; and to hear this amazing man you would have conceived him to be amusing himself on a pleasure excursion rather than to be fighting for his life in a darkness which had owned him for days.

We sat down, put out our lamp to economize the oil, and rested. My watch had told me a little before that it was two in the morning, and a low moaning in the ears informed us that the tide was up and was breaking in the outer caverns. The sound was ghastly in its quality,

not threatening and angry as it was on the cliffs without, but pitifully whining and groaning — as it were the voices from a lake of damned souls with no hope of redemption. Its lamentable clamor filled the subterranean corridors. It went to the heart. It never rose or fell, but remained ever one long low burden of woe, forced, as it were, from victims who knew there was no answer to their cries, but could not contain them for sheer physical suffering.

Norroy made some remarks, a poor attempt at conversation, and at last was silent; and then I think we both dropped off to sleep. When I awoke I felt hungry and stiff and bewildered, and I wished that the larder I had come across earlier in the night was accessible. I took a little whiskey from the flask. I lit the lamp and examined my watch. It was past eight o'clock and the tide would be out again. There was no sound in the corridors; all was still as a graveyard. The dying were dead and the damned were silent.

I woke Norroy, who confessed to hunger, but was eager to resume work.

"Look here, we can't be far off," he said after a nip of whiskey. "Look at that row there was all night. Let's get along."

We started on our task again with some freshness, and explored several more passages, but without finding any traces of feet which would suggest that any of them was the adit from the mouth of the cavern. After two hours' work we rested again, and made a renewed attack in force thereafter. Norroy's stump of pencil had been worn out, and with its fading he grew less confident. And now I regretted that I had not attempted to get at the larder when we had struck the

central warehouse, from which I had originally reached it.

"If we only had a bottle of ale and some cheese!" he groaned, and then "I say, Brabazon, let's smoke a cigar," he brightened. "That keeps you from thinking of your stomach, they say."

I had no cigars, but I had a case of cigarettes, which I had forgotten in our wretchedness, and now we lit one each with a certain satisfaction.

"It's very odd," mused Sir Gilbert, as if he were talking in his smoking-room, "how you've got to see the smoke you make to properly enjoy it. I ought to be revelling in this, but I'm not."

Of course we had put the lamp out while we rested.

"Got another match?" he said. "I've lighted mine sideways. Cigarettes are no good to me."

I felt in my pocket. I had only a few matches left. "We must husband them," I said.

We finished our cigarettes and resumed, and we had not been at work ten minutes before I called out that on the sand before me was the print of heavy boots.

"Good old Brabazon!" cried Norroy, admiringly. "I say, you are a daisy! Now we shan't be long."

I am not ashamed to say that my own heart was pumping excitedly. I put the lantern closer to the floor and hurried on. The tracks led downwards the way we were going, and there were several of them. Undoubtedly this was the main gallery used by the conspirators to and from the copper lead. The reflection just flashed through my head that I had not yet revealed to Norroy the explanation of the mystery, and that he had not asked again about it. How like a child! His mind had no persistence; and yet his will was obstinate.

Why this thought came to me in so triumphant a moment I knew not; I was hastening on, nose to ground, running up the scent almost mechanically, and with a swelling heart. And then without warning the lamp sank and expired, leaving us in utter blackness.

CHAPTER XX

THE TIDE

HOW can I picture to you the terror of that reaction! In the moment of our triumph, at the very instant that we had succeeded in getting upon the trail to the upper air and the beautiful world of light and sound, our hopes were dashed to flinders. The supply of oil had at last given out. It had given no warning, but the flame had gone out with a single flicker. I uttered an oath for which surely I shall be pardoned; and Norroy, in the suddenness of the surprise, lost his footing and pitched heavily against me.

"The oil's gone!" I exclaimed tragically.

He recovered himself, and I heard him sit down in the darkness opposite to me.

"Damn it!" he remarked simply; and then, "What about the matches?"

I knew they were only too few in number, but they were our only hope now. I struck one, and with all possible speed followed up the tracks till it went out. Then I lit another, and repeated the operation, Norroy blowing hard behind me. There were six matches in all, and I succeeded in traversing some fifty yards by their help. And then darkness once more, and this time darkness from which there was no possible relief, unmitigated deep darkness, and darkness in our hearts.

The first thing to secure was that we should keep together; and so it was arranged that we should call to each other constantly, to prevent any possibility of either going astray. Next, we resolved to move forward along the gallery in which we were by feeling on the walls. We proceeded perhaps a dozen yards in this way, and then the wall terminated under my hands, and I knew we had come to a cross track. Despair seized us. We had no means of telling in which direction we should move now, whether forward, or to right or to left; everything must go by blind chance.

"Let's try the right," said Norroy, and we tried it.

It harrows me even at this distance of time to look back upon that dreadful night in day and to recall the emotions to which we were subject. Norroy's matter-of-fact voice was at first of some assistance to one's nerves. It did not seem as if anything could be so far wrong with that placid temper beside one. And I think I felt his collapse, when it came, all the more. I had not looked for it, and it shocked me.

His voice ceased gradually and he sank into silence; and the silence imposed upon that maddening darkness seemed to reinforce our terrible condition. I spoke to him, and he did not answer. I called, fearing that he had moved away. . . . I put out my hand and it touched him.

"What is it?" he asked dully.

I don't think he had heard; he had sunk into apathy, almost into coma. My voice passed him as if he were inanimate, and it was only at my touch he woke.

"Don't let 's lose heart!" I pleaded in dread. "If we do we are done for."

"I suppose," said Sir Gilbert, slowly, as if thinking,

"I suppose starvation will do the trick. I 'd sooner have that than the other."

"What other?" I asked in a low and frightened voice.

"Well, look here," he said, "how much of this can you stand?"

"Probably as much of it as we shall have to," I answered rallying.

"No, you won't," he said slowly. "I 've had a bit. I know. I dare say you 'll stand it longer than I will."

"What are you afraid of?" I whispered again, in a terrible fascination.

"Going off my head," he returned in his dull tone. It was unlike the Norroy I knew. I was scared.

"Nonsense!" I protested weakly.

"I know," he said. "I 've had it. I 've been here ten days."

That he had not yet been there four days made the effect of his statement worse. I did not correct him. I had no heart. We sank into silence again.

I do not know, of course, how long I slept, but I know I fell off in the mercy of God, and when I woke I was afraid to speak lest I might awake a sleeping comrade. I sat still, therefore, my mind flowing drearily onwards. The awful moaning of the waters again filled the caverns. I fixed my thoughts on Perdita — Perdita in the light, Perdita with the sunshine playing on her bronze-gold hair, Perdita with her vivid rose face. I shut my eyes, as if to pretend that the darkness was only within me, and that the day was broad without, and the curtains of my vision parted and I saw Perdita. She was always in the light.

What I had loved first and always about Perdita was the sunshine of her face. Her presence lit up a room; she was radiant with color and brightness. I could see her now. . . . The wailing of the lost souls came up the rocky corridors. I shut my eyes tighter, and strove to close my ears to all but Perdita's voice. Sweet and low and infinitely various in its inflections it sounded in my ears. And I saw her dewy eyes, full of tenderness, under the inspiration of love. Was not this the day I was to go to Perdita and ask for Perdita's hand? I wondered what hour it was. It was time I was there for certain. I should, perhaps, be at this moment entering the little sitting-room at Mrs. Lane's. . . . Perdita rose from the window and came forward to meet me, silent, with no sound, but only with her eloquent face. I took her in my arms.

Somehow Miss Fuller entered the room, started and went back. She was ever a discreet woman, and I had given her a message for Perdita. I saw Miss Fuller's heap of parcels rolling in the dust again. I picked them up for her. There was an envelope with its contents strewn, and what was it — "Miss Rivers?" I wondered why.

Through a rift in my consciousness the voices of the damned and dying rolled in upon my soul. A groan sounded by me.

"Are you awake, Norroy?" I asked.

"I 've never been asleep," he answered. "I was keeping quiet for you."

"And I for you," I replied. "But I have slept, and I wonder how long."

"I don't know," he answered. "All time 's the same here. Is n't that sound awful?"

"Don't think of it," I enjoined. "Keep your mind going. Think of something you value."

"I suppose it is all up with us, Brabazon," he said presently. "There is n't any chance."

"Only the chance of their relenting," I said, "and I suppose that is n't much. But we can go under with the flag flying, old chap."

"Oh, yes," he assented listlessly, and then, "They must have seen your footmarks. I wonder what the devil it all means."

That reminded me. This patient creature was still in the dark as to the secret of the caves; and so I told him. To my astonishment he grew quite interested.

"Golly!" he exclaimed. "A copper mine! Who the deuce would have thought it! I say, Brabazon, if we did manage to squeeze out of this that would be all right for me, what?"

"Let us suppose we shall!" I suggested.

He laughed harshly. "All right. It won't do any harm. I 'll lend you a couple of thousand, old chap, if you want it."

"I can do with it," I said with alacrity, "and then we 'll take a holiday in the Pyrenees for the winter."

"It would n't be bad," he said. "They 've got damn good golf courses at Biarritz and Jean de Luz. But oh, hang it, what 's the use? We 're cooked!" His odd mind reverted to the discovery. "Cunning beggar, that Naylor man. He 's a real crook, I should think. Damn it, Brabazon, to think that I shan't be able to turn up at my case! We 'll be skeletons before that time. Oh, he 's an artful beggar, and I 've been a silly cuckoo." I heard a sound and guessed he had got on his feet. "Look here, old man, I 'm not going to be

diddled by these bounders. I 'm going to get out, what?"

"Excellent!" said I, glad to see his obstinate will stiffen. When it cooled in its mould there were few chances of breaking it.

"Come along," said he. "Let 's have another shot at it."

I rose, too, and together, keeping touch with each other, we made our last essay.

It was a gallant effort, and when we succumbed I recognized it was the end. But Norroy's temper was as unbending iron; he clung to his resolve with the tenacity of an animal at bay. Tired, weakened with his long incarceration, beaten to his knees, he still fought on.

"We 'll have a bit of a rest," he panted, "and then go on again."

We drank the last of the whiskey and sank down, and compassionate nature sent us the relief of sleep. The last thing of which I was conscious was the droning of the waters somewhere that we could not reach.

I was awakened by an odd sensation on my face which had sunk to the level of the sandy floor. I had a strange and ugly and broken nightmare, and I awoke to the lapping of water on my cheek. I put out an arm half unconsciously and it went into cold water. I started. I was fully awake. What was this? And then I knew. It was the tide!

I shook Norroy, who came to with difficulty, owing to his weakness, and told him of my discovery.

"The tide!" he cried. "Good Lord, then we 're —"

"Saved!" I ejaculated. "This is the high-water mark in the underground passages to which we have

blundered in the darkness. If we wait now till the sea goes down, and follow it up as it retires we are bound to come out. God be thanked!"

"Bully!" cried Norroy, feebly. "Did n't I say we 'd see it through, old man? Look here, where is it? Let me feel it."

He leaned eagerly forward and dabbled his hands in the wavelets that rippled in by our legs.

"I say, Brabazon," he said presently, "we 'll stick to that arrangement, my boy."

"What arrangement?" I asked, wondering at him.

"Why, about the two thousand quid, and the Pyrenees and so on. Look here, what do you think? Would the Harveys come?"

It was pleasant to talk thus, and I was almost as light of mind and heart as was he in the wonderful reaction.

"Yes, if you angled them properly," I said.

"You 'd better," he said after a pause, "I 'm not much of a pet with women."

"Why, I 'm sure both Mrs. and Miss Harvey think a lot of you," I replied.

"Think so?" he asked eagerly. "Does she really? Honest injun?"

I knew which he meant by his singular pronoun, and I reassured him of my sincerity, which profoundly delighted him. He began to draw up a wild scheme for future holidays in which the Harveys and myself were to participate. But he never mentioned Perdita. Oh, Sir Gilbert Norroy, dear, dull Englishman, was the most kindly and self-centered and stupid of men. But I let him talk; nay, I encouraged him to do so — and all the time the tide was turning.

It began to go down at last, and it ran out fast. Keeping one to each side of the passage, we pressed on, never losing touch of the miraculous water by a foot's width. Out ebbed the sea with a ripple and babble of water, and with every moment our hearts grew lighter and brighter.

We cared nothing now for tides and cross-roads and adits and exits and turnings. Our sightless eyes were fixed forward ever towards the receding sea, and step by step we tramped after it, telling one another of the upper world without and the light and the free breath of heaven.

And now I began to perceive a sensible loosening of the darkness. It grew lighter, as it were the darkness of the night when the dawn is coming up. I almost felt that I could make out the rocky walls by which we guided ourselves through the cavernous places. And foot by foot we were on our way towards the light.

The light! Yes, it was light to us, though the world above us was lying wrapped in deep night. I saw that much when we reached the inner cavern, and I could catch a glimpse of the blue-black sky without. The sea stole out reluctant into the outer cavern and we advanced with it. It hung there, as if loath to retreat farther; and beyond the mouth of the cave the wild water was roaring on the rocks. The sky, as I have said, was light to us, but in reality it was black with storm. The rain beat on the sea in sheets, and the wind blew out of heaven in a gale. We stood, waiting with incredible patience for the withdrawal of the tide beyond the cavern, which would give us access to the rocks and the face of the cliffs beyond.

And then between us and the sky-line, suddenly I

was aware of something blacker, starker than the heaven.

"A boat! A boat!" cried Norroy, seizing my arm.

It was a boat under spirit sails, and it seemed to be riding across the face of the water in front of the cave.

"What is she doing in so close?" I asked aloud. "On such a night, and in such a storm what could induce men to take so great a risk?"

Has she been blown in perchance by the gale, a fisher boat from the channel? I strained my eyes to make out what I could, and after that terrible darkness of the caverns I was able to see more clearly than I otherwise should have done. Her bow appeared to be turned towards the cliff, and the rag of the sail blotted out the mast, but as she drove nearer in the storm a figure was visible clinging to the sheets. Behind that mass of black cloud I knew there was a moon somewhere lightening the general cast of the sky; and now through a jagged breach in heaven it showed, slight and silver, for a moment, and in that instant the boat, headed for the caves, bore down upon us, and was lit up from end to end. In the stern was a man struggling with the tiller in the draw and suck and maelstrom of the waters. But my eyes only dwelled on him momentarily; for the form in the prow arrested my attention. It was a woman's. She stood, with both hands upon the shrouds by her, hatless, with blown hair and blown gown, and even through the mist of rain and spray I knew her. I uttered a cry. It was Perdita, recognizable in every line of her body, recognizable in the poise of her head and neck, in the upward curve of her arms. For one instant she stood thus above the level of my fascinated gaze, a spirit of the storm, as it seemed, a wild sea-

maiden out of the tempestuous waters. And the next the boat plunged, rode down upon the caverns, lurched and cracked like brittle china on the outlying rocks of the cliff. But more than that I saw not; for as she went down in the water, carrying my heart and life, I was aware of a dull pain in the head and consciousness left me.

CHAPTER XXI

LOVE IN DEATH

THE blackness of night environed me. I drew a deep breath which was a sigh as I realized this, and knew that all I had gone through was a dream. It was indeed a characteristic dream, from the lapping of the water about my face to our arrival in the outer cavern, and to the storm and the Loreley of the storm as she swept down upon us in pity and majesty. I groaned loudly, and a voice called my name.

"Is that you, Norroy?" I asked weakly; "I 've had a strange and vivid dream. I dreamt we 'd got down to the outer cavern."

"No, you did n't, old boy," said Norroy's voice. "It was n't a dream."

But these were not Norroy's hands that held mine, they were too small and delicate. In a maze I removed one hand of my own and put it out with a queer elation of the heart.

"Dearest!" whispered a voice to me. "Dearest!"

Perdita! Then it was no dream. But a dozen questions rushed upon me. What had happened? How did we get here? Where were we? And how was Perdita here? Yet in that exultant moment it was enough that she was there, sitting by my side, her tender hands clasping mine.

"Perdita!" I murmured. "Oh, my sweetheart, my dearest, my darling with the dove's eyes! Was it really

you then, and no angelic vision merely? I saw you riding the storm, dearest, like a minister of mercy. What were you doing there, my sweet and beautiful?"

Her fingers trembled on mine. "I came to you," she whispered back.

"For me!" I echoed. "But how? But why — "

"You did not come," said Perdita, softly in the darkness that was now light to me. "You said you would come and you did n't. I went to the Castle, because you had told me where you were going, and I was afraid. I did n't believe that there was no danger. I felt there was danger." She shivered. "And at the Castle they had heard no news of you, and then I knew I was right. I knew that some evil had come to you. And so I came."

I drew her slowly, firmly, confidently out of the darkness towards me, and her face rested on my shoulder.

"Dear brave heart!" I murmured in her ear. "Tell me how."

"Feel any better, old chap?" broke in Norroy.

"Yes," I replied. "I am quite recovered. Indeed, I am fit for anything," I laughed. So great and strong and deep is Love that can conquer all things.

"I say, is n't Miss Forrest a brick?" he demanded heartily. "She came after us."

Me! Me! after me, O foolish and blind! I pressed her hair and it was wet and disordered. "I must learn all," I said. "Please go on, dear."

"And when you did n't come," proceeded Perdita, "I went back to the village, and I went to old Hawes, the boatman. And I told him all that I knew, and what you had said, and where you were going. And Hawes

listened, and rubbed his tobacco and put it in his pipe, and he said :

" ' Well, Miss, I reckon those caves are a bit mazing. When I was a boy I nigh got lost in them myself.' "

"And so we arranged to go to them at once, and see what — what had happened. Hawes would have it that you had lost your way, but somehow I knew better. And the tide was up, but I could n't wait, and so Hawes suggested that we should get as near to the cliff as we could, and then make our way along the rocks when the tide ran out of the caves. But the storm got up and the rain came, and somehow the rudder got broken, and we got in that current and drove on the rocks, and — Oh !" Perdita sobbed. "Poor Hawes is drowned. He must have gone down with the boat."

"No, no," I soothed her. "These old sailors know too much. He is sure to be all right." But I wanted to know more. What did Perdita in the caves with us? And where were we? It was Norroy who answered my query, and in a shambling awkward voice.

"Well, we 're back again, old chap! Same old business !"

"How back!" I cried. "But how is that? Why, we were in the outer cavern."

"It 's that damned Cerberus — beg your pardon, Miss Forrest. But he is, you know. Lives in Hell. I should know, as I 've been there along with him for a fortnight. Fact is, Brabazon, it 's plain the beggar was n't out of the caves, and he laid us out."

"Laid us out!"

"Yes, is n't your head a bit sore? Mine is. He and the other chap must have come up with us just as we were thinking of clearing out, and I saw the dwarf

sock it into you. You gave a cry, and that called my attention. But you must have cried out before you got it. I saw the bar come down on you as I turned. And then t'other brute got me."

My heart sickened. We were back then in the old cave, with all the old terrors and despair. But no, there was no despair for me with Perdita by me, though I might experience fear for her.

"They must have carted us somehow up here again," went on Norroy. "I came to a bit on the way, and there was a light, and I remember a huge cave." I knew what that must be — the warehouse of the smugglers. "Well, and here we are," he ended vaguely.

But Perdita was still unaccounted for. I had seen her go down in the storm and clamoring waves; and here she was by my side.

"Oh, that 's a bit odd," said Norroy, when I plied a further question. "They must have fetched Miss Forrest up afterwards; anyway she was here when I got my senses again."

"I must have lost mine," said Perdita, softly. "I remember going down, and a huge gulf of water opening over me, and then I don't remember any more, until I was conscious of being carried somewhere in the dark. And then I felt a sudden shock, and I found I was lying on a cold rocky floor, and some one was groaning near. It was you, dear," she whispered in my ear.

"Rum thing their saving you," said Norroy.

"But I don't understand it all yet," replied Perdita. "Who are they?"

And so we told her of the dwarf, and of his confederates, of our struggle in the darkness, and of the copper

lead in the bowels of the cliff. She listened silently, and when I had done, said, "Then, they are keeping you here till the case is over." Swift and nimble were my dear love's wits upon this opening mystery.

"That 's it," said Norroy.

"And they won't do us any harm," continued Perdita. "Because it 's not in their interest to do more than prevent Sir Gilbert from putting in an appearance."

"You argue like a book, sweetheart," I whispered.

"And, moreover, they would n't have saved me if they had wanted to do us any harm."

"By Jove, no, no more they would," said Norroy, cheerfully. "We 're looking up."

I said nothing. There was another explanation of the seeming mercy of our enemies. If Perdita had been allowed to go and had escaped the sea, she would have brought down a new expedition upon the rogues. Yet it was not clear that they had any interest in our death. Of course Norroy's evidence was sufficient to send the dwarf and his companion to prison; but they were evidently only the servants of the conspiracy. And there was no real connection yet traced between the prime culprits and the acts of violence to which we had been subjected. If the dwarf and his comrade vanished forever, what charge would lie against Naylor or Horne, who had merely taken advantage of the rights that the law allowed them?

Yet the mere optimistic statement of our case by Perdita in such confident tones seemed to infuse cheerfulness into the atmosphere. We were in prison again, but there were mitigations this time. We had proved that it was possible to get out, and our situation was known now to our friends above. I discovered this

fact from Perdita, who had told Jackman on what mission she was bound, as well as Miss Fuller. The latter had endeavored to dissuade Perdita from the attempt, urging in her wisdom that the task was rather one for men alone. But my Perdita had obstinately run away from this advice, had taken the bit between her teeth and bolted, and had left behind her doubtless now an alarm. Moreover, it was not at all certain that Hawes had perished, or had been taken by the confederates. And for all these reasons we were justified in looking forward to our ultimate rescue.

The need immediately pressing was food and drink, certainly for Norroy and myself who had been long without either. This matter was discussed between us, and Norroy volunteered to feel his way round the wall so as to discover in what sort of place we were. I warned him to call out at regular intervals so that we might keep him in touch with us, and then he departed.

"'If you were life, my darling,
And I your love were death,'

I should be content," I said. "I want nothing now, not even life, for you are life and I have you. Perdita, sweet, did you see me watching you, hear my prayers as you stood like the Spirit of Storm in the prow? I prayed for your safety. I know not why, but this darkness is full of light to me. I can see your face, can't I, sweet? There are two dove's eyes, alight and dewy, and a soft mouth that is a bud, a slender nose, a rain of bronze hair. . . . Ah, how its fragrance goes down into my soul! Were you wet by the ruthless sea, sweetheart? And did your beautiful hair toss like seaweed in the foam? If I come upon that dwarf I will

reward him with vast hoards of gold instead of killing him — because he saved you, my Loreley."

She pressed close; I put my arm across her heart and she was dripping from the sea.

"Sea water, child, never hurt a baby," I said. "But we will soon strip those wet garments from you and clothe you in shining soft vesture. I like you in all colors, dearest. What shall I buy you for a wedding-gown?"

"A man does n't buy the wedding-gown," stammered Perdita.

"Oh, does n't he? Well, I will, you see, and that makes the difference between a man and me. You may think me an ogre, Miss Forrest, but — "

"Hark!" said she, "is that Sir Gilbert?"

I called to him and was answered.

"Perdita, you are, like all your sex, a deceitful little cat, full of tricks. You knew it was n't Norroy. Well, of course, I 'll alter all that when we are safely married."

"But you don't know if we shall be," murmured shy Perdita. "You 've never asked me."

"I apologize, Miss Forrest. I 'm very sorry. But a previous engagement unfortunately interfered with my proposal. However, I 'm glad you did not wait for me to propose, and I beg to acknowledge your esteemed favor containing your own proposal with thanks — the same is receiving consideration and will receive answer in due course — "

"Oh!" said Perdita.

"Please, Perdita, tell me what you will do directly we are released. I always like my plans laid well ahead. I know what I 'm going to do, and I have a natural

curiosity to learn what you will. Personally, I 'm going to be married."

"Who — to whom?" said Perdita.

"Oh, just a beauty. At least, critically considered, I don't know — perhaps — well, yes — if she had a little — But, anyway, she 'll do for me. Her name begins with a P because she is pretty."

"I say, Brabazon," Norroy's voice boomed from the rocks, "here 's a go. I believe I 've found — "

"Where are you?" I called.

"Over here. There 's the mouth of another cave here, and I tumbled over something."

I rose, helped Perdita to her feet, and with my arm about her groped my way across to his voice. We passed through an opening and I kicked something with my foot.

"That 's it," said Norroy, excitedly. "What the devil is it?" I stooped and felt. It was a box. We groped on the floor for some minutes patiently.

"I 've got a tin of some sort," I said.

"Golly, I 've got a bottle. What do you think?" said Norroy.

"It 's the larder!" I exclaimed.

"The larder!" said both. I explained. I had come across the larder in my earlier explorations.

"This is all right," said Sir Gilbert. "Miss Forrest, would you like a go at this? It 's bottled beer!"

His tone was triumphant. Perdita declined on the ground that she was not thirsty, and I heard the gurgle down Norroy's throat. We sat and drank, and ate from the tin which we opened with a knife, and which contained mutton.

"Now we shan't be long," said the cheerful baronet.

We sat and talked, and our spirits were amazing for people immured in Stygian darkness, and beset by obdurate and unscrupulous foes.

"Anyhow," was Norroy's summing up, "we 've got possession of the grub. We 're going to confound their knavish tricks. And what 's more, with this blessed mine under me I 'm not going to lose the Castle. I 'll stick by what 's stuck by us all these centuries. I shan't need to beg of my Rivers cousin, the little manufacturess."

Perdita's hand was in mine and I felt it jump. Rivers! What was Rivers doing in my mind? I suddenly remembered. The letters dropped from the burst packet had been addressed to Miss Rivers.

Norroy was talking still, but I did not hear him. My wits were busy. Perdita's hand trembled in mine. A strange thought came into my head. What was Miss Fuller doing with letters for Miss Rivers? Perdita tried to pull her hand out of mine, and somehow I guessed — somehow I knew. I held her hand fast.

"What," I asked slowly, "is the name of your cousin?"

"Name!" There was a pause. Perdita was trembling all over.

"Is it Perdita?" I whispered in her ear.

"I don't know," he said. "Must have heard it, but I 've never seen my mother's relations — governor quarreled with 'em. She 's probably a decent sort, high cheekbones and big features and all that."

"She 's not," I cried. "Norroy, you impertinent, blind ass! You 've thrown away all your chances. I can tell you what she 's like. She 's the most lovely woman that walks this earth. Her eyes — "

"Don't, don't," pleaded Perdita in tears.

"If you could see her you would know," I said. "But you can't because it is dark, and your eyes have always been blind. Perdita!"

"Eh, what?" said Norroy.

Perdita was weeping, I think, but, dear heart, I did not know then why she wept. It was only afterwards that I discovered that she wept for foolish shame. In the full panoply of romantic sentiment she had come forth to see this unknown cousin in disguise, and had fallen in love with a — nobody. And now she was ashamed of that innocent and foolish whim.

"Shall I tell him, Perdita?" I asked softly, and I got no answer. But I kept her hand.

"Your cousin is going to be my wife," I said as softly.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Norroy. "Why, who the Devil, what?"

"Oh, it is my fault; oh, I am ashamed!" cried Perdita, burying her face in my arm. "I should n't have done it. I only wanted to see — How did you guess? How abominable of you to guess!"

"It was a packet of letters," I explained, "and the solution has just come to me."

"Oh, I heard — it was too bad of Isabel — I was afraid — "

"I should like to know what the mischief it all means," said dull Sir Gilbert.

I told him, and he said, "Good Lord!" and then after a moment he began to chuckle. "It 's a rum go," he said. "By Jove, it 's a sort of romance. Are you Miss Rivers then, Miss Forrest? I say, what am I to call you, cousin?"

"You can go on calling her Miss Forrest," I said quickly. "You 're not going to call her Perdita."

"I say, Brabazon!" he exclaimed, and then the situation beat him. "Well, I 'm damned!" he declared. "Fancy you being the little Rivers girl!"

"She is not little, and I 'll ask you to address my future wife properly," I said with dignity.

"Well, you kept it pretty dark, both of you, I must say," said Norroy, paying no heed to this. "I suppose I ought to call you cousin, and take cousinly privileges."

"I don't like that word privileges," I said. "I think you 'd better go away, Norroy. Go to your Plutus."

"What beats me is how you came to be about here, cousin," said the persistent and clumsy Norroy.

"That 's nothing to do with you," I declared, as I felt Perdita shiver. "She came on a sketching tour."

"Oh!" He thought it all over, and either decided to let it pass, or was derailed by a side track.

"Is Miss Harvey pretty well?" he inquired politely. There is a story of a filibustering Englishman who marched an army into the territory of a friendly power, was encountered by its forces, and engaged in battle. A truce having been arranged to discuss the terms of surrender, our Englishman met the enemy's envoys with the offer of a drink and the clumsy, inconsequent attempt at civility of "I hope we have n't knocked you fellows about much."

I shall always think of Sir Gilbert Norroy in connection with that filibuster. He was self-centered to a fault, yet never mislaid his manners; and never appreciating the full significance of things he thus would shed a farcical light upon the most tragic situations. Yet I shall always think of him as something heroic in

his way. Consider what length of time he had endured in this darkness and with these privations, and admire the way he maintained his sang-froid. This was the more noticeable to me as time went on, and my own hopes sank. Of course I said nothing, but, on the contrary, did my best to cheer Perdita, but I do not know that I made so gallant an effort as this unimaginative Englishman. He must have refrained with difficulty from his native candor, and from thus blurting out our predicament. Instead, he rattled on foolishly about horses and Monte Carlo, and odd meaningless adventures he had had here and there and everywhere. I never knew more pointless stories than Norroy told, and I even came to wait and look for the banality of them as one expects the point and crisis of an ordinary tale. They meandered like a stream vaguely in different directions for some time, and then simply disappeared in the ground. Still, his flow kept us from thinking of our own case, and Perdita was interested in his having been to Pompeii. I think he rode off on to that on some race-horse with an Italian name, like a true conversationalist. Perdita inquired what Pompeii, untombed, was like.

"Jolly," said Sir Gilbert. "Awfully jolly," and hurried on as a lively memory occurred to him, "and, I say, I saw a chap in the streets there stand on his head and shake his trousers right down to his knee! Look here, cousin, you ought to visit Pompeii," he concluded with avuncular wisdom.

"Perdita is going with me when I go," I said. "Pray, address your remarks to me, Sir Gilbert Norroy. What, by the way, did you say you were going to do when we 'got out'?" I asked Perdita.

"I did n't say anything," said she.

"Well, tell the kind gentleman now," I enjoined.

"You don't seem to realize," murmured Perdita, "that I am not subject to your orders."

"I always begin as I mean to go on," I told her. "Some people enter into the bonds of matrimony with their eyes wilfully shut. I insist upon yours being open, Perdita."

"But I don't happen to be going to be married," said Perdita.

"Wha–at!" I gasped. "Norroy, is this the way you bring up your cousin?"

"I say, I 'm sorry I spoke of you as I did," broke in Sir Gilbert at this juncture. He had been thinking it over, "but I did n't know, you know — about the money, I mean."

"It did n't matter at all," said Perdita, quickly.

"But why did you call yourself Miss — "

"You 've talked too long," I interposed hastily. "Go to sleep."

"It is n't a bad idea," said the good-natured fellow, "if we only could. They may come in time to wake us up."

We had that beautiful idea to drop off from; but, alas, it is not so easy to control the mind. I believe Norroy went to sleep, but Perdita did not, nor I. And the silence and the darkness suddenly began to oppress her. She grew frightened, and cried out to me; and I drew her nearer, and she wept.

"It is the long night," she whispered. "I did not think I was such a coward. Oh, forgive me!" She gulped back her tears and clung to me. She had faced the storm and the water with brave heart, but she had

succumbed to the awful sapping of these silent terrors. The darkness sat round about us in league. Perdita's tears wet my cheek. I kept her close, and whispered to her, as it were a father soothing his child.

At length she passed into slumber, pillowed against me, but I lay wide awake, staring into the dark, and hoping — hoping —

The silence was punctuated by the deep breathing of my two companions. I did not know what time it was, but I guessed that it was night again, and that it had been four and twenty hours since Perdita had come ashore. I lay, with all my senses preternaturally alert, looking at a blankness which began to be relieved with gloomy pictures. Dark figures strove in it and executed grotesque and horrible contortions. Whether I shut my eyes or opened them it was the same. The blackness began to get on my nerves as it had upon poor Perdita's. Thank God, she was sweetly asleep, an occasional movement only witnessing to the perturbed spirit.

On my ears, straining in the deep silence, a small sound fell and I turned my head. It was like a mutter, interrupted and resumed again. And on that there was a chink as of a pick on stone. I stirred, listened, gently and softly put Perdita from me, so as not to disturb her, and got to my feet, still listening.

A regular chink, chink, now struck on my ears, and I groped along the wall in the direction from whence it came. You will remember the twine, so fatally diverted from its use. I had, from a sense of prudence, even in my despair, retained the balls I had wound up. And now they came in useful to me. I tied the end of a ball round one of the boxes in our cell, and letting

out the string followed it. I had all along resolved that after the party had been refreshed by rest we should make once more a determined attack on the maze, using these balls as the means of getting back to our base of supplies in the event of failure. But I found this earlier use for them. The noise of the pick on stone, continuously repeated, guided me, and I made my way through various windings of the passages until I heard it more clearly. There was now no mistake possible; it was the obvious noise of a pickaxe.

It came louder, and then a little suffused light broke on the senses, and now furtively I pushed on, until, rounding a corner, I came in view of two figures.

The blaze of the lantern by them dazzled my enfeebled eyes, but after a little I made out two men, — one the dwarf with a pick in his hand, wielding it with huge arms on the wall before him. The other man was evidently the lean, dark fisherman from the Point. He stood by and watched, and occasionally examined something which he held in his hand.

I now thought that I had the mystery clear. These were two of the men in the secret of the gang employed to prospect the ore, and doubtless they were at work here tracing the lead through the galleries. Yet my heart, dismissing their errand, rejoiced at the new promise of rescue. I had the connections with our prison cell safe behind me, and if I dogged the tracks of these men I should eventually find the way to the light of the sun. It was only necessary for me to keep hidden and not to risk discovery. When I had set out on my rash expedition to the caves I had taken the precaution to arm myself with a small revolver. I felt this now in my pocket in order to be prepared for any

emergency. It was clear we were dealing with unscrupulous rogues, and I was ready to fight to the end for what I felt was our last chance. I stood in the dark shadows and watched and waited.

After a time the dwarf ceased, and paused, leaning on the haft of his implement. A distant murmur now became audible, and I recognized it as the cry of the sea, but no longer was it like the travail of lost souls. It had, on the contrary, a note of hope, of encouragement, of triumph; it was a friendly sound.

"There 's half an hour before the tide," said the tall man.

"It will take less," said the dwarf, grimly. "I 'd best go a bit more in."

He lifted his pickaxe again, and struck, detaching a big piece from the wall.

"That should be enough," said his companion. "It will give plenty of room."

The dwarf leaned on his pick. "Damn that swab," he said. "'T is he bringing all this on us."

"Well, maybe they 'll find nothing," said the other, with a short laugh. "We can't afford to run that risk."

I could not understand. But it seemed as if the boatman had escaped and was giving our enemies trouble. Yet what else did their talk mean?

A few more blows with the pickaxe followed, and then the fisherman stooped and peered down into the hole. "That will do," said he.

"Ay, I 've seen worse blasts than that," said the dwarf.

The two men bent their heads together over the hole, and I could not hear their exchanges. Then they rose.

"That fixes it," said the dwarf. "We 'll give it the five minutes."

In my anxiety I peered out of my black corner, but I could only see their retreating forms. I was resolved to keep them in sight, and I moved forward. One of the men was stooped as he went along, as if he manipulated something on the floor.

I got as far as the place where they had been working, but, though I cast a glance at the hole, it was now involved in gloom, owing to the receding light. I went on, and suddenly my eye was caught by a trail on the ground. I scrutinized it, and then bent and touched it. The men were twenty feet away, round a bend in the passage.

It was hard and continuous to my fingers. In a rush the terrible truth came upon me. It was a blasting-fuse and they were designing a blast of dynamite!

With that discovery the purport and the consequences of the destined explosion flashed on me. They were engaged in sealing up the caverns! The pursuit, the hue and cry on the surface of the earth, had pressed them so far that they were removing all trace of their nefarious plot and their wickedness, and cared not a rap that in so doing they were dooming to a horrible death the three unfortunate victims of their conspiracy.

Immediately, in the phrase, I saw red. I sped down the passage, and rushed on them round the corner, drawing my revolver from my pocket. They must have heard my footsteps, for the dwarf had his pickaxe raised to strike. Without hesitation I fired in a frenzy and an oath followed. Then he dashed at me, and pulling on a second cartridge, I dodged. The edge of his weapon took my shoulder, knocking me down, and

the reverberation of my shot raised a thousand echoes from the corridor.

"Quick, quick, — " An obscene oath ensued. I struggled to my feet, and, the pistol having dropped from my hands in the fall, grappled with the dwarf. He was broad of figure, and seemed immovable, but I strove to get my leg between his, and throw him. Alas, he came of Cornish stock, and he flung me off as a bull-dog would a terrier. Then he stooped, and, seizing me, tottered with me in his arms up the passage. A voice behind us followed with echoes that swallowed up the meaning of the words. Neither he nor I heeded. I wrestled and struggled, but his gorilla-like arms circumscribed me, and at last we fell together on the floor.

"Home! Home! Back! Back!" came like the voice of a bull from behind. "Back, you fool!"

The dwarf disengaged himself, throwing off my grip with a final effort, and turned to go. He sped with antic leaps down the passage in the twilight. I saw his body in the air for an instant. And then the drums of my ears were almost broken with a terrific roar, and I knew nothing more.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CIPHER

WHEN I recovered it was with a dull pain in my head, and a strange perforating pain in my ears. I groped about me, and crawled first in one direction and then in another. Wherever I went I came up against rock, and huge pieces of rock littered my way as I crawled. Then, with returning wits, I remembered the string and began to feel about me. I fancy I was ten minutes before I found this, and getting to my feet followed it up. Soon I ran into more rocks, through which, apparently, the twine went. But by dint of patience and effort I at last found a hole through which I squeezed my body, picked up the string again, and pursued it through a clear passage. Thank God, at least the road to the cell in which I had left the others remained open.

I hauled in the last of my clue, and called:

"Perdita!"

Voices answered me. They were safe! But the noise of the explosion had rolled over them like thunder, and they were in great distress, having discovered my absence. I told my story.

"Sweetheart!" I said, oblivious of Norroy's presence, and I took her in my arms. "Sweetheart, whatever befalls, remember that I love you."

"And I you!" she answered back, and hung on me, and wept a little softly.

"Better luck next time, old man," said Norroy, with his indomitable cheerfulness.

Ah, if I could but think there was any next time! It is true we had provisions which might last us some days, and that the air in those chambers might suffice to supply us with life for some time longer. But what prospect was there of ultimate rescue? Nothing seemed before us save a long drawn-out death. After a little Norroy and I resolved to make excursions in sundry directions, not actuated so much by real hope of finding a way out, as by the mere necessity of doing something. We made use of the string-balls, and for some time occupied ourselves with going to and fro. But a change had come over the labyrinth. It seemed to have shrunk materially in size and variety, so that we constantly were brought up against blind walls, and were driven to other directions. The secret of the maze had perhaps been simpler than I had thought, and apparently one blast had sufficed to block the entrance to the interior. This looked as if, after all, there was only one true exit from the cliff-face; and that had been closed by the débris of earth and rocks in the convulsion of the explosion.

We returned worn out to the cell in which Perdita rested, endeavoring to keep a brave heart. But she broke down a little later, and sobbed like a child, crying out that it was dark and she could not bear it; while I strove to comfort and solace her, and Norroy sat ejaculating oaths dully in the darkness. By and by she composed herself under my ministrations, her sobs ceased, and she listened like a child, as she had cried

like a child, to a story I had begun like a child for the benefit of my audience. It was the tale of a child wandering in a lonely forest, and unable to find his way out. Profound night enwrapped the forest and the child was in the heart of it. And first the wolves came out, and their eyes were like points of fire in the circumferent darkness. And the lonely child saw them and was afraid."

"Why was he afraid of the wolves?" asked Perdita, "I should only have been afraid of the darkness."

"He was afraid of the wolves, Perdita, because they were strange things to him. This child was not afraid of the darkness. He knew it could not hurt him. Night is benignant, and in its kindly shadows all the hurts and ills of the day are healed. There is no terror in the darkness to those who are wise. The child was wise. For one thing he knew that light and darkness are but figments of a finite mind, differing infinitesimally; and that all light comes from within, and that the soul may be like a paradise of fairy lights, when all is night without. Give me your hand, Perdita. I will light up that soul of yours. See, at a flash it leaps into broad day. What do you see now? Shut your eyes. Forget."

"I see the sun on the Castle gardens," said Perdita, breathing fast, "and the rhododendrons and the growing Mary-lilies and the sweet-william in Mrs. Lane's garden, and below the estuary and sails on it — ah!" she gulped down something.

"Don't be afraid of the wolves," I whispered. "Don't you see the shore beyond and the light on the woods?"

"Yes," said Perdita, "and the clouds big in heaven,

and the blue and — oh, I cannot bear it!" she broke off.

"Go on about the kid," said Norroy. "Seems like a sort of tale I heard when I was a boy."

"No," said I. "It 's time for lunch. What will you have for lunch, Perdita? Sardines, pâté de foies gras truffles, salmi of duck or — "

I persuaded her to eat a little, and I heard the gurgle of Norroy's bottle — I laughed low and long. It was so funny to think of Norroy's bottled ale. If I could only hypnotize Perdita into sleep!

"I shut my eyes," I said, "and I see a shore and it is rosy with dawn, and the sun goes ever higher, and the shore gets ever brighter. And it is n't far away."

"That 's the shore we never reach; it is the shore we dream of," said Perdita, in a low voice.

"Our dreams are best, Perdita," said I.

"Yes, dreams are best," she sighed and crept closer. "You once said I was cynical about ideals. But I 'm not really. I believe in ideals. I am glad I have had ideals."

Dreams are best! And only dreams were left for us, all else should

> ". . . become first a peace out of pain,
> Then a light, then thy breast,
> O thou soul of my soul . . ."

On Perdita's breast it would not be so hard.

"I am quite happy now," whispered Perdita, nestling nearer. "I don't mind now. It was only — the darkness. But I can see quite plainly, and I believe in that shore of yours, dearest."

I pressed her nearer still, for my heart forbade words.

Silence fell. . . . Physical and emotional exhaustion had its way with us, and we passed into oblivion.

A hand on me awoke me.

"I hear something," said Perdita.

I was wide awake, listening. I, too, heard something. It was like a tapping of a hammer on stone. I aroused Norroy and we all three listened. Undoubtedly it was a tapping, low, but distinct, and as if at no great distance. Quickly we fastened the string again to its anchorage, and Norroy and I moved off to grope our way through one of the openings nearest to the direction of the sound. I had gone some steps when a hand touched me, and then felt along my arm and seized my fingers.

"It is I. Don't leave me. Let me come with you. I am not afraid, dearest. I have lost all fear. But I feel strangely excited. Do let me come."

Of course I let her; we went hand in hand, as I edged forward, through the partitions of the rock.

"Hush; stand still, Norroy. Listen!"

Yes, the sound was clearer and louder. I hastened on. Perdita tripped and would have fallen had I not caught her in my arms. Louder and clearer! I thought I could hear the noise of chips falling under the hammer. I wheeled round a black corner and encountered cold clammy air like that of a charnel house. It seemed to get into my throat. I coughed and gasped. Were we to be poisoned as friends were breaking through? I raised my voice and shouted, and the hollow echoes streamed backwards and forwards along the passages, calling and ever calling mockingly, and with increasing faintness in my ears.

Then there was a sudden flare on the hellish dark-

ness, a blinding glare. I shouted again. Perdita was dimly visible by my side, stumbling on. The voices flowed along to us: "Brabazon! Is that you?" and a shriller voice, "Is Miss Forrest there? And Sir Gilbert?"

In another moment we rushed into the area of the lantern and stood revealed.

"Thank God!" said Mr. Toosey, flashing the light on us. "Thank God, we 're in time."

Miss Harvey went off into wild laughter that was half hysterical, and seized Perdita by the arm and kissed her, and put her arm in mine, and shook hands with Norroy all over again and again.

Meanwhile Toosey was rapidly giving me a brief explanation.

"It 's the cipher," broke in Miss Harvey. "It was Mr. Toosey's cleverness. He found it out. Oh, my dear, I 'm so glad we 've got you again. We thought you were drowned when Hawes told his story. Only we could n't find any trace of you."

"Is Hawes safe?" asked Perdita.

"Yes, yes; he got ashore and thought you 'd gone; and he came and told us all. And we resolved to try the caves again. But we could n't get in. The way was all choked up."

"The scoundrels must have blown up the entrance," said Toosey, "when they found we were on their tracks. But no one knows why — "

Oh, well, we should straighten out the tangle directly and in good time. We had each much to learn. But for the moment nothing signified, nothing was of importance save that we were saved.

Yet it was impossible not to learn some of the story

there and then; for to our astonishment we discovered that the rescuing party had gained entrance to the underground chambers by a connection with the cellars of the Castle.

"It was the cipher!" again declared Christobel excitedly. We should learn in time. Now it was necessary for us to find our way to that upper air and light from which we had been so long excluded, and which we had never thought to breathe and see again. Mr. Toosey had broken through a thin wall of plaster which had been erected between the Castle cellars and the top of the caverns — no doubt some time after the abandonment by the Norroys of their connection with the illicit trade. And by this we obtained access to a passage off the cellars, and ascended by the aid of the lantern a flight of stone steps. At the top of these we passed through a hole and then to my surprise, I discovered that we were on the secret stairway in the wall leading to the picture gallery. Five minutes afterwards we were in the morning-room, with the full tide of the bright June sunshine rolling in at the open door and windows, and subject to the tender ministrations of Jackman and his wife and Miss Fuller, who hung weepingly on Perdita. Perdita retired with Miss Fuller and Miss Harvey, and I went to the window. I stood there limply, with my hand on the sill, for some time drinking in again all the delights of life and light. I could not speak. My spirit fainted for its very fullness. And Norroy, who had been in that horrible prison longer than I —

"I say, old man, I 'm taking some of your whiskey and soda, do you mind?"

I dropped into a chair and fell to laughing weakly.

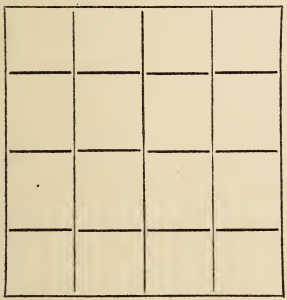
From the information communicated by Toosey and Miss Harvey at a subsequent hour, I am enabled to give this résumé of the proceedings during our absence.

Miss Harvey came over in distress on the same evening that Perdita was lost, and found Miss Fuller in tears. The story of that rash and noble sacrifice was related, for the boatman, Hawes, had got back with his tragic tale. It was assumed that Perdita had perished, though Miss Harvey steadfastly and stoutly refused to credit it. But my own fate was in greater doubt, for Perdita had declared that I intended to explore the caves. It was thus the obvious duty of the party to search for me there with the possible chance of receiving some light on Perdita's fate and Norroy's. But the report bruited about the small neighborhood must have come to the ears of the conspirators, and precipitated their murderous action. They had hoped thus to conceal their abominable plans and to dispose of all suspicions forever. The caves were discovered to be blocked and the explorers returned sadly, wondering if the story of my expedition had been true, and divided as to the advisability of pushing the exploration further in that direction. This was where Mr. Toosey came in.

That ingenious spirit, indomitable after a hundred rebuffs, had pored over the copy of the "Novum Organum," catching, maybe, some instinctive gleam of the truth out of that romantic mind of his. In the pursuit of his investigations he had spent two nights in the Castle, having been frankly accepted by the Jackmans, who had a strange faith in him. And, finally, at three in the morning, he knocked at Mrs. Lane's door, roused the household, which included Miss Harvey that night,

and unrolled before the ladies in their dressing-gowns his wonderful theory.

It was Miss Harvey who was fired by it, and who insisted that there and then they should go up to the Castle. Her chauffeur was aroused, and the car took the trio up the hill. Jackman and his wife entered into the spirit of this forlorn hope, and the secret passage was tested. You will recall that the cipher ran thus:



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Toosey's wild imagination hit the truth. The secret passage was connected with the smuggling caverns. Heaven knows what inner romantic twist in Jackman's nature had made that staid and matter-of-fact butler an adherent of the extravagant evangelist. Miss Harvey declared that there was something in him that convinced her, and there it must rest. His solution was ingenious. With the anxious party trailing after him he had descended the secret stairs twenty steps. Then on the right wall he had marked out his square of bricks, and had counted three to the right, and then three down, thus arriving at the thirteenth brick. This he had insisted on having removed with a pick, when

it was seen that a hollow opened on the other side. Excited by this discovery the men succeeded in enlarging the hole so as to admit of the passage of a body, and Toosey passed through. His investigations now laid bare to him another flight of stairs in the wall, which descended to the level of the cellars, and from which access to these was possible through a blocked doorway. Jackman had broken through this, and then the search seemed to have ended in failure. But Miss Harvey who had followed them, casting her lantern on the other side of the passage, had seen signs of a second doorway. This, too, had been destroyed, and the entrance to the underground galleries had been thus opened. In our prison cell we had lain not more than thirty or forty feet away from the foundations of the Castle; and I saw now how it was that I had been disturbed by the noises I had set down to the death tick. The channels of the caverns had conveyed the sounds of the dwarf and his companion as they mined the ore in the upper chambers.

All this story I pieced together gradually, and when we had recovered from the strain of our incarceration. Immediately after that, we set inquiries going in the neighborhood, inquiries which the detective, engaged by Mrs. Harvey, arrived just in time to superintend. A break-down gang entered the cave at low water, and the bodies of the dwarf and his companion were found in the ruins with which they would have involved us. Later I solved more of the mystery. The fisherman, Dalling, had always been a character of some suspicion at the Point; the dwarf, it turned out, was called Horne, and we learned that he had a brother in London who had "got on." He lived at the group of cottages

on the cliff, to which I had once tracked Naylor. I could not doubt that this Horne, who was a practical miner from Cornwall, had made the discovery of ore in the caves, and had communicated with his brother, the commission agent. Hence, the widespread and elaborate plot to oust Norroy, and to obtain possession of the estate. The secret out, the commission agent disappeared, and Mr. Naylor was not heard of for some time. Though we took legal advice it was not considered that we had evidence to establish definitely the connection of either with the kidnapping of Norroy, or the blowing up of the caves. Such is the law!

With our release from our terrible captivity the story should fitly end. Yet there is one thing more to chronicle. Norroy did not have to fight his case, or even to go into court. The action never went farther, and we assumed that Mr. Naylor was afraid that we possessed more evidence than we had. Moreover, if the case had come into court it would not have mattered; for at Norroy Castle rules Lady Norroy, late of New York.

As for me, I have nearly finished my book, but "Studies in Earth," will probably wait some time ere it sees the light. I have other work. My dear Perdita has overwhelmed me with a heap of financial responsibilities, and seems glad to be rid of them. I have told her that she married me under false pretences; for I had wooed and loved a girl whose face was her fortune, and — well, I happen now to love a woman who is of wealth and consequence in the world. Moreover, we have a place which we consider is much superior to the Castle. It may not be so old, and storied, but it is more

comfortable, it has sweet gardens, and is within sound of the challenging sea, — and it is our own.

I am glad Perdita believed in that shining shore of mine. We watch it often from behind our southern windows, and I hope we shall see it always — even unto the end, and beyond.

THE END